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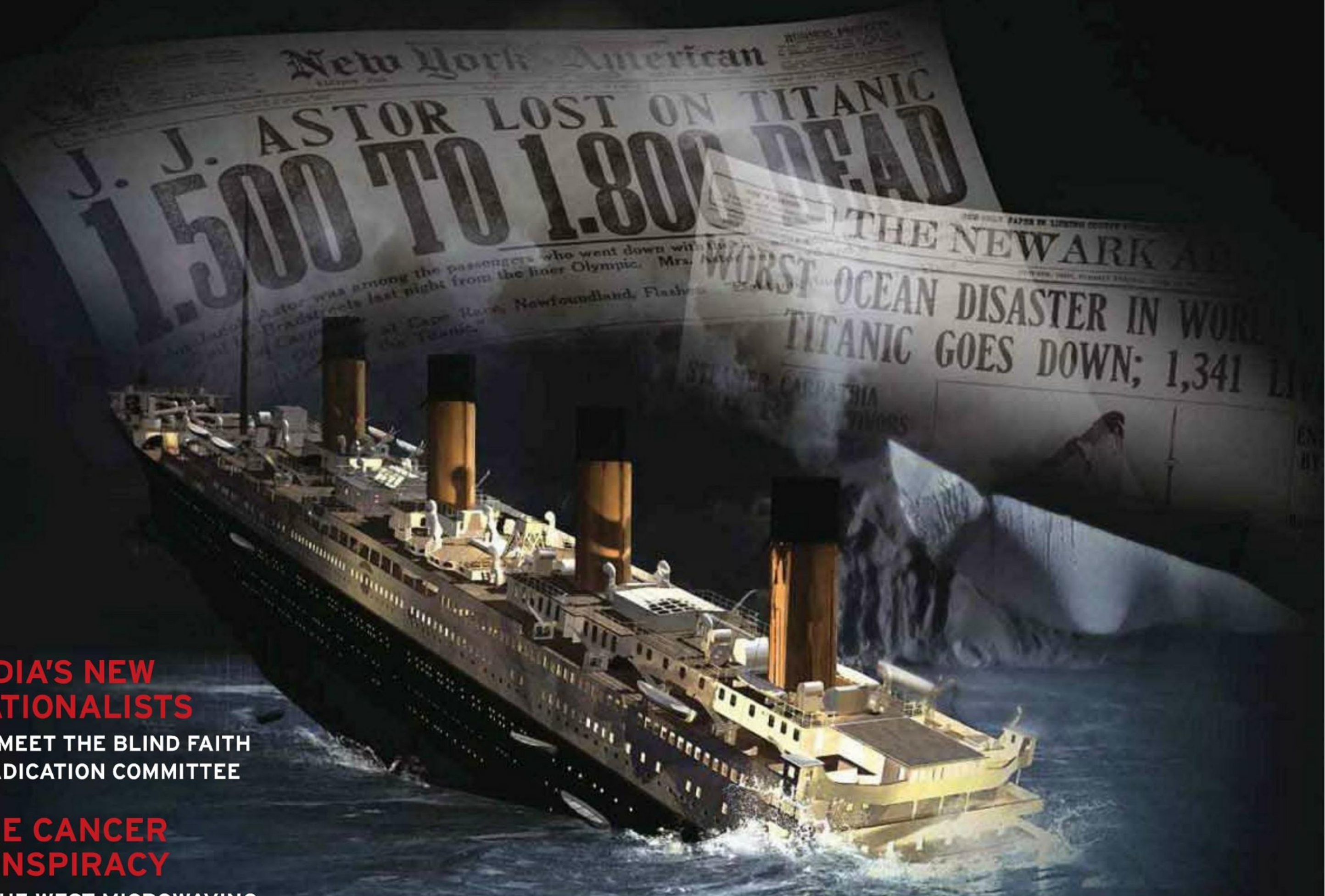
TITANIC PREMONITIONS

HOW HISTORY'S MOST FAMOUS MARITIME DISASTER WAS FORETOLD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J. J. ASTOR LOST ON TITANIC
1,500 TO 1,800 DEAD
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WE MEET THE BLIND FAITH ERADICATION COMMITTEE

THE CANCER CONSPIRACY
IS THE WEST MICROWAVING FOREIGN REGIMES?

FROM ROSWELL TO RENDLESHAM
EXPLODING THE MYTH OF CRASHED FLYING SAUCERS

Write Your Way To A New Career!

Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-three Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-three years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

Students such as Tim Skelton. An engineer by profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. In 2005 I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to Luxembourg. I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

> *"My writing career took off exponentially."*

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2008. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

Hazel McHaffie

Tim Skelton

These are just a selection from the inspirational true stories from students of The Writers Bureau. There's no reason why YOU couldn't be their next success story. With a 15-day free trial and money-back guarantee, there is nothing to lose and potentially a whole new career to gain! So why not visit their website at www.writersbureau.com or call on Freephone 0800 856 2008 for more information?

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"So far, I have had eighteen novels published. The Writers Bureau helped make this possible for me. Within six months of enrolling on my course I was having work commissioned by editors and I still work regularly for magazines."

Michael Foley, Essex

"Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. By the end of this year I should have eight books already published and hopefully two more finished."

Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent

"I thought you'd like to know that seven years since doing my course at WB I've been published in more than 150 magazines around the world. I've now got to the stage where I'm turning down all-inclusive exotic press trips!"

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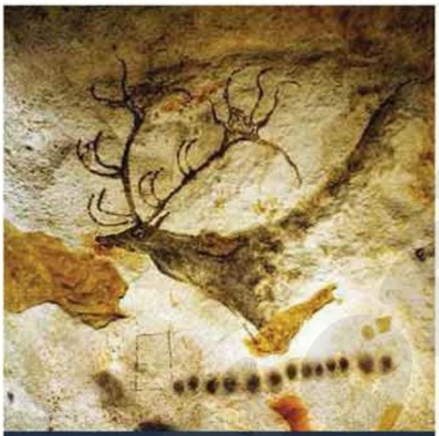

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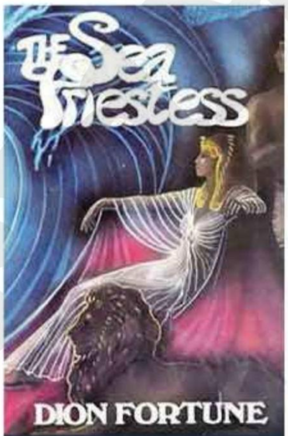

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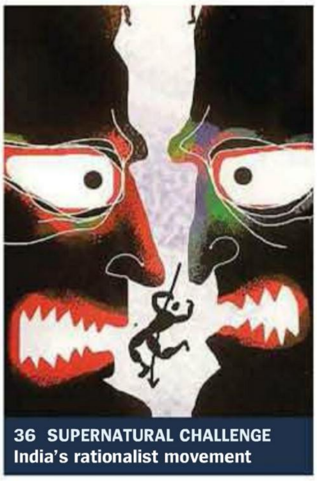

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editorial

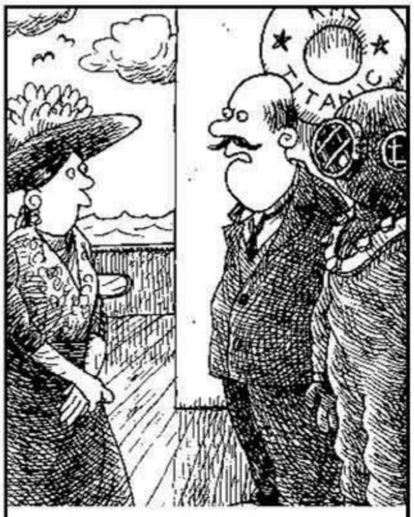
For Those In Peril...

Titanic premonitions

This issue's cover story marks the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the *RMS Titanic* on 14 April 2012, a maritime disaster that has kept a firm hold on the popular imagination ever since. When the state-of-the-art behemoth of a liner hit an iceberg in the North Atlantic, the ship went down with a loss of over 1,500 lives – a terrible tragedy which, says Carol Fenlon in her article, many believed was presaged, portended or foretold in dreams, premonitions and omens (see pp30–35).

But was it really caused by hubris, human error and an iceberg? Well, it was an iceberg that actually sank the *Titanic*, but scientists have recently fingered a new culprit – the Moon.

Professor Donald Olson of Texas State University has argued that a rare combination of astronomical factors may have played a part, with the Moon coming closer to the Earth on 4 January 1912 than it had in 1,400 years, and just one day after the Earth made its closest annual approach to the Sun. The result: a record spring tide that may have dislodged an unusual number of icebergs from Labrador and Newfoundland and swept them south into the *Titanic*'s path. *D.Telegraph, 6 Mar 2012.*



"Excuse my wife, she had rather a vivid dream last night".

MARTIN ROSS

Sticky wickets and astral battles

Forteans aren't perhaps widely known for their sporting prowess, but with the start of the County Cricket season, we make a rare sally into the world of bats and balls. Barry Baldwin bowls us a few googlies which reveal the curious side of cricketing history, while Martyn P Jackson dons his pads and defends a particularly sticky wicket as he uncovers the game's dark, suicidal secrets.

Elsewhere in this issue, Gary Lachman explores the magical career of Dion Fortune, Bob Rickard reports on a mass panic from Kuala Lumpur ("Nothing brings a community together quite like hunting an oil-drenched demonic rapist," as one source had it) and Charles Foster concludes his fascinating look at the biology of spiritual experience. Something for everyone, we hope…

Apologies to the Otherkin

In our feature about the Otherkin (**FT283:44–46**), we reproduced as an illustration the banner from the Otherkin Alliance website (www.otherkinalliance.org/). After unsuccessful efforts to contact the Alliance, we went ahead and ran the illustration before obtaining proper written permission, for which we wholeheartedly apologise. We would now like to make clear that the image should have been credited to www.otherkinalliance.org/ and the artist Myenia, who created the striking original graphic.

FT286: Asleep at the wheel?

Various excruciating errors appear to have crept into this gremlin-riddled issue.

FT286:1 Mikita Brottman, author of the Forum article 'Death on the 13th Floor' is incorrectly listed as Mikita Brittman on the contents page. Our apologies to Mikita for this typo.

FT286:46 The photograph of Bernini's sculpture is captioned as showing "St Teresa of Avilon" (a zoo in the Philippines) rather than St Teresa of Ávila (a Spanish city).

FT286:59 The author of *Sleep Paralysis* is Shelley R Adler, not Alder as spelt six (count 'em) times in the review.

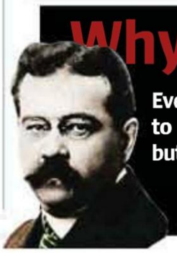
DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

CRYPTOZOOLOGIST'S WIFE MISSING

On Friday 10 February, Danish cryptozoologist Lars Thomas's wife Jeanett Rask left their home in Copenhagen for a shopping trip. She was supposed to be gone for just a few hours, but never returned and seems to have disappeared without trace. Appeals in Danish newspapers and on television have been unsuccessful, as has an ongoing police investigation. As we go to press, Jeanett has been missing for over a month. We would appeal to anyone with any information as to her whereabouts to contact us in confidence and we will pass it on to Lars.



Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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the last jubilee

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

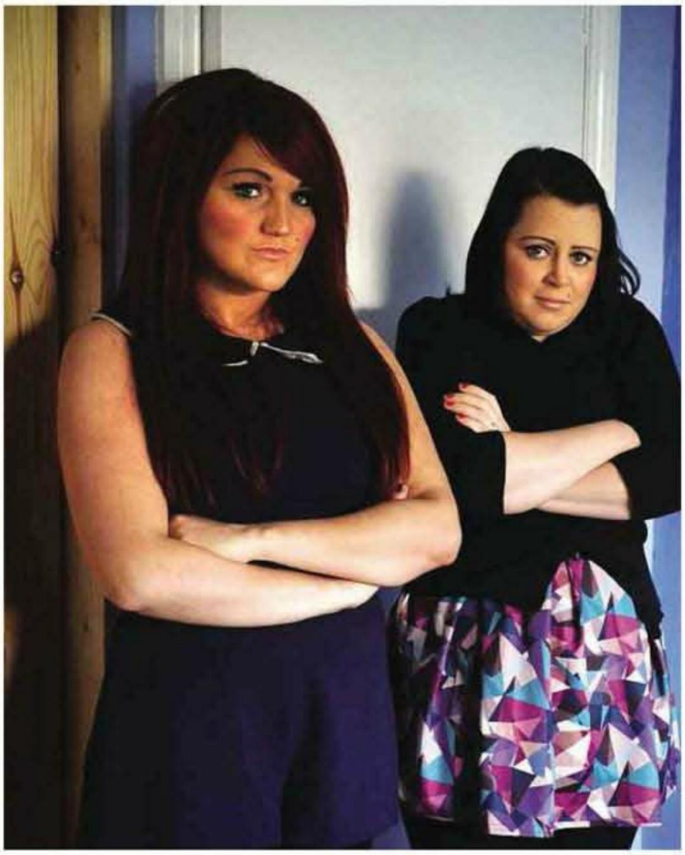
strangedays

Ivor the poltergeist

Resident driven from council flat by aggressive voice, banging noises and other strange goings-on

Ashley Summers, 26, has fled her first-floor council flat in Friar's Croft, Kirkintilloch, near Glasgow, Scotland, after being plagued by unnerving phenomena. The council care worker believes a restless spirit was trying to communicate through her four-year-old son David. "When we first moved in [seven years ago], everything was fine," she said. "Then, around three years ago, my ex-partner told me he heard a gasping voice and he said it swore at him. I didn't believe him… It was only about Christmas things started to happen. One night I was lying in bed when I felt something tug on my bed covers, but I just rolled over and thought nothing of it. Then David told me he was talking to a man in the room, but I ignored him, thinking it was an imaginary friend. He said the man was called Ivor, and he was bald with only one eye, and that he was his friend. After that I had a shoe thrown at me when nobody else was in the house. It came out of nowhere, went flying past me and almost hit my face."

Then 'Ivor' told David to put a cover over a light bulb to start a fire. His elder brother, eight-year-old Lee, removed it but developed a mysterious heart-shaped burn on his hand the next morning, despite not hurting himself at the time. Ashley had the flat blessed by a priest and organised visits from a couple of spiritualists, but none of them seemed able to help. One of the spiritualists suggested she spread flour on the kitchen floor to see if the ghost would communicate with her. She returned to find a D-shaped pattern in the flour, with a finger pointing at it. "I have the only keys," she said, "so there is no way someone is playing a trick." On other occasions, pots and pans from the kitchen appeared in her bedroom, a mobile phone was hurled at her, a crucifix she put in the flat vanished and she heard disembodied voices.



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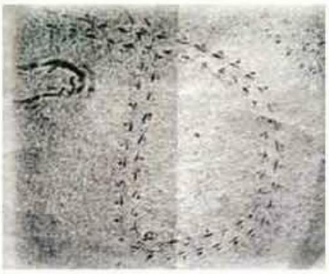

LEFT: Ashley Summers and Vicki Marshall in her son David's bedroom. **BELOW:** A strange pattern drawn in flour on Ashley's kitchen floor.

A D-shaped pattern had appeared on the floor

Ashley finally decided to flee with her sons "a few weeks ago" (according to the *Daily Record* – presumably in early January). "We got chased out of the flat," she said. "When we opened the door, it just kept shutting and the ghost was banging all the cupboard doors. We just had to leave." She subsequently discovered that the previous tenant had to move out after experiencing similar spooky goings-on. At the time of the reports, Ashley was staying with family and had lined up a new flat in the private sector, with rent of £600 – twice what she had been paying for her council flat. Her next-door neighbour in Friar's Croft – Vicky Marshall, 27 – said she had also felt a spooky presence. "When I first moved in, I could feel something in the back room," she said. "Ashley told me she had experienced the same things in her flat. If things continue I'll be forced to move too." *D.Express, 8 Feb; D.Record, 9+10+11 Feb 2012.*

- Laura McKirdy and her mother Fiona, who run a café in Cardross, Dunbartonshire, believe they are being haunted by an old lady local people have dubbed Nanny Goony. "I had just locked the door one evening when a jar of lollipops went crashing to the floor," said Laura. "I thought I'd just pick them all up in the morning but, when I came back, they were back in the jar and stood upright." Sweets have also moved on their own, crumbs appeared on newly wiped tables, and pictures fallen off the wall. Fiona said: "One time we heard the sound of legs moving under a table, but there was nobody there." *D.Record, 25 June 2011.*

RINGS RETURNED
Long-lost love tokens and memorials turn up years later
PAGE 9

THE OILY MANIAC
油鬼子

GREASY MONSTERS
Malaysian towns live in fear of demonic attackers
PAGE 12

LIFE ON VENUS?
Claims that photos show a "scorpion-like creature"
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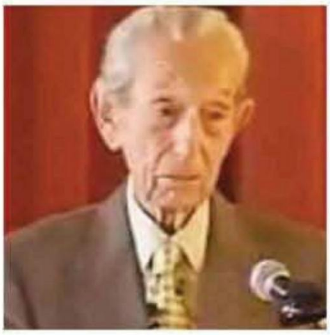
Camping eats humble pie

Harold Camping, 90, a retired civil engineer and president of Family Radio International, a non-profit evangelist radio network broadcasting from Oakland, California, predicted that the world would end on 21 May 2011 [**FT269:11, 274:55**]. On the day of the Rapture, "the believers in Christ who have not experienced physical death will be changed into their glorified bodies," he said. "At that time, they will be caught up in the air to be with Christ." Some 200 million people would be saved – an improvement on the traditional 144,000 (*Revelation* 14:3) – while those left behind would die in earthquakes, plagues and other scourges until Earth was consumed by a fireball.



After 21 May came and went, many listeners were crestfallen, particularly those who had quit their jobs or donated some of their retirement savings or college funds to spread the Word. Marie Exley, 33, was among those who spent her own money to put up billboards in Colorado announcing the Rapture, and later met her husband while distributing Bible tracts in Japan. The pair then travelled throughout the Middle East to publicise the prophecy and spent 21 May holed up in Montana waiting for the end. "Sure, I was looking forward to it," she now admits, "but it's actually a blessing to reconnect with family and friends."

Speaking to the media on 23 May, Camping said that while the world had not ended, the spiritual Rapture had begun, and the Earth would be obliterated on 21 October [**FT277:26**]. He said a mathematical error also prevented an earlier apocalyptic prediction from materialising in 1994. Then on 13 June Camping suffered a mild stroke and spent several months recuperating.

When 21 October also came and went with no sign of the Rapture, Camping made no public statement, but on 8 March this year he published an online letter called *When is the Rapture?* "We humbly acknowledge we were wrong about the timing," he writes. "We tremble before God as we humbly ask Him for forgiveness for making that sinful statement." But while the predictions were a mistake, they were all in God's plan. "Even as God used sinful Balaam to accomplish His purposes, so He used our sin to accomplish His purpose of making the whole world acquainted with the Bible." He said he has no evidence of an impending apocalypse and will no longer predict global doom. *[AP] ABC News, 9 Mar 2012.*

EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Beach huts talk

Blackpool Gazette, 2 Sept 2011.

› Troll jailed for net abuse

Metro, 14 Sept 2011.

I'm no goldfish, says Japan's latest premier

D.Telegraph, 31 Aug 2011.

Psychic sheep predicts New Zealand rugby victory

D.Telegraph, 9 Sept 2011.

False widow is a real pain for biting walker

Dorking Advertiser, 25 Aug 2011.

Vampires welcome at 15th century pub

Kent Messenger, 2 Sept 2011.

Gordon Ramsay's dwarf porn double Percy Foster dies in badger den

Melbourne Herald Sun, 15 Sept 2011.

Man, 86, routs gun raider with lettuce

D.Express, 18 Aug 2011.

Parrot chirpy about in-car Asteroid

PC World, 25 Aug 2011.

Irish team discovers useful zombie gene

Irish Times, 23 Aug 2011.

Ruling confirms tax liability after death

Australian Financial Review, 22 July 2011.

Bats invade Transylvanian classroom

[AAP] 2 Sept 2011.

SIDELINES...

HAM FOR ABC

Three rare breed piglets were found half-eaten at Beech Tree Farm in the village of Ham, near Sandwich in Kent. The deaths were blamed on a big black cat seen crossing a road next to the farm about a fortnight earlier. A stable girl was alerted when horses in a field "went berserk". She said: "The [cat's] body was over a metre long and the tail was just as long. It looked quite fat, with its belly almost touching the ground and had really chunky legs." *Sun, 13 Jan; Sunday Express, 22 Jan 2012*.

CAR PARKED ITSELF

A station wagon reported stolen from a shopping centre in Adelaide Hills, Australia, was found 17 days later in a garage nearby. It had disappeared on 18 December, two days after its owner bought it. Police believe the brake was left off, leaving it free to roll through the car park, across a street and down a driveway, before forcing itself under a roller door and parking perfectly inside the garage. It was found on 4 January when the householders returned from holiday. *Canberra Times, D.Mail, 7 Jan 2012*.

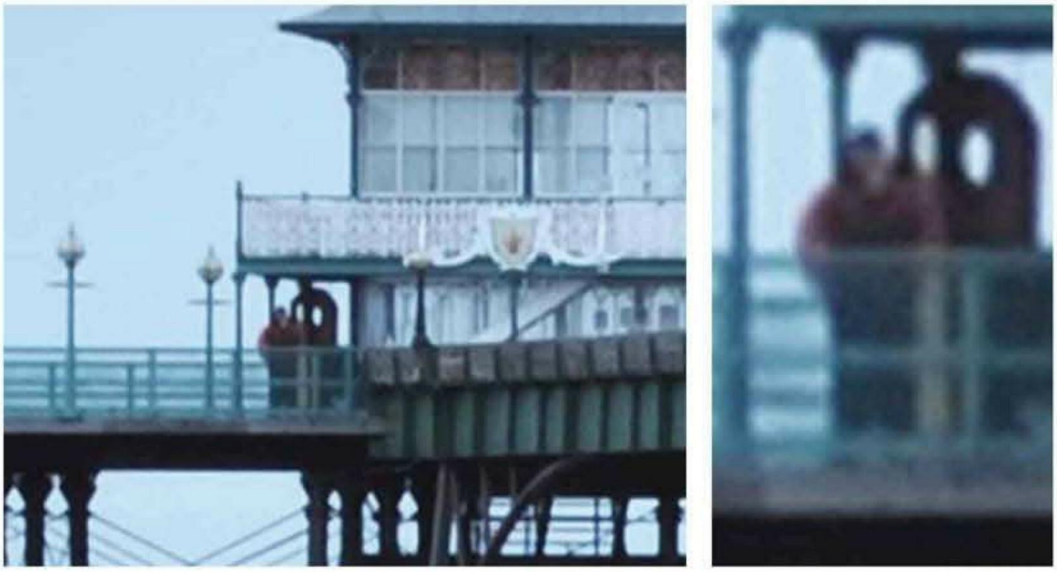
GIANT FOX

A fox shot dead on New Year's Eve as it prowled near a housing estate in East Grinstead, West Sussex, measured 4ft 6in (1.37m) and weighed 35lb 8oz (16kg). It was thought to be the biggest fox ever caught in Britain. *Sun, 2 Jan 2012*.

MARTIN ROSS

The ghost on the pier

Student photographer captures uncanny brief encounter



CATERS NEWS AGENCY LTD

ABOVE: The mysterious figure who appeared in just one frame of a series of photos taken of Clevedon Pier, Somerset.

A student photographer seems to have inadvertently captured a ghost on Clevedon Pier in Somerset. Matthew Hales, 17, from Yate, took an early morning trip to Clevedon last November to take pictures of the incoming tide for his A-level coursework at Brimpton Green and Chipping Sodbury Link Sixth Form. He was using a time-lapse technique on his Nikon D3000 that takes pictures over 30 seconds. It was not until he checked the individual frames that he noticed a ghostly male figure standing on the pier, apparently looking straight at him – but only on one frame. He had arrived in Clevedon at 6.30am with two classmates and had taken the photo about 15 minutes later. The pier was closed and not due to open until 10am.

The picture continued to puzzle Matthew until he saw a report in the *Bristol Evening Post* about a mystery figure appearing to anglers in the early morning mists as they cast off from the end of the pier. One morning at 4.30am, Jack Hulbert, 72, a retired antiques dealer from Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, saw a figure in dark clothes, leaning on the railings looking out to sea. He shouted across to what he thought was a fellow fisherman, then walked over for a chat, but when he reached the other side the figure had disappeared. Other fishermen have seen a figure walk through the locked pier gate without triggering off the security light, or sitting on the side benches halfway down the pier, or standing mumbling incoherently in the corner of the pavilion.

When he got to the other side the figure had disappeared

Pier mistress Linda Strong, 56, was told the area of the estuary around Clevedon was dubbed the "ghost coast" because of the number of unexplained sightings. The old *Clevedon Mercury* offices were said to be haunted by a grey lady and last October the tenant of a property in Old Street told Clevedon Town Council he had seen an old man in clerical garb sitting in the corner of the room. Some suggested it could be the ghost of a vicar who used to teach Bible lessons there.

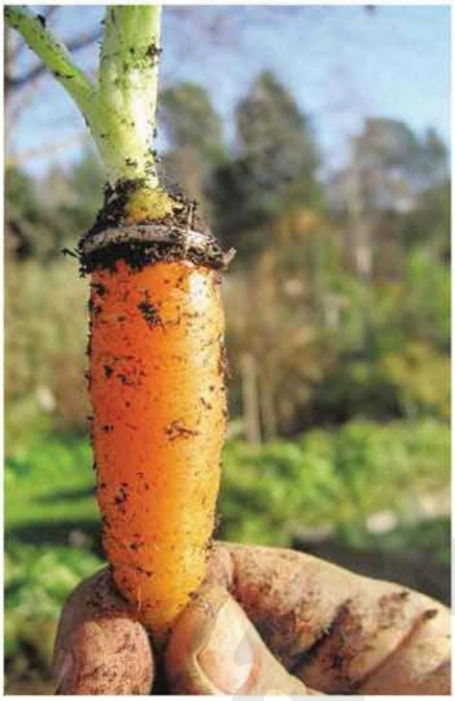
Fishermen are allowed on the pier round the clock seven days a week and often fish early in the morning; but Ms Strong doesn't think the odd image is an angler. "Looking at the pictures there is no evidence that this is a fisherman and the figure seems to have appeared from nowhere," she said. "There are clearly no fishing rods out to sea. This could very well be the ghost that everyone is talking about. There have been a few different stories and you start to think there must be something happening on the pier. A lot of the recent sightings took place in November. A young man called Chris Buxton used to come here at night and fish quite a lot and he swears he saw something as well. There are theories it could be the ghost of an old fisherman or the spirits of the departed whose loved ones have thrown their ashes off the pier, but no one really knows." *Bristol Eve. Post, 8+16 Feb; Metro, 17 Feb 2012.*

What goes around...

Wedding rings and a mourning ring found after many years

A Swedish woman has discovered her wedding ring on a carrot growing in her garden, 16 years after she lost it. Lena Paahlsson, who lives on a farm near Mora in central Sweden, had taken off the ring before a Christmas baking session with her daughters in 1995, but it vanished from the kitchen counter where she placed it. The ring, which she had designed herself, was made of white gold and set with seven small diamonds. Lena and her husband Ola searched everywhere and years later took up the tiling on the floor during renovations, in the vain hope of finding it.

Then, last October, Lena was pulling up carrots in her garden when she noticed one with the gold band fastened tightly around it (right). She guessed that it had fallen into the sink back in 1995 and was lost in vegetable peelings that were turned into compost or fed to their sheep. The ring no longer fitted, but Lena planned to have it enlarged. She told *FT* that thanks to the story making so many papers, she managed to renew contact with a relative she hadn't spoken to in 35 years, now residing in Minnesota. More remarkably, children's author Nancy Bopp contacted her to say how delighted she was to find that her 2002 book *The Gardener's Gold Ring* – which tells a very similar story – had come to life! *BBC News, 31 Dec 2011; telegraph.co.uk, 1 Jan 2012.*



ANNA PAHLSSON

An author was delighted that her story had come to life

In 1941, Violet Bailey and her fiancé Samuel Booth had a row while walking in the countryside near Gilmorton in Leicestershire and, in a rage, she threw her diamond engagement ring into a field. The couple subsequently made up, but searched in vain for the ring. They married and raised a family. In January 2008, 67 years later, her grandson Leighton Boyes, who had taken up metal detecting as a hobby, got her to show him on a map where the ring had been lost. After two hours' searching, he unearthed it three or four inches below the surface. It was as good as new. Mrs Booth, a widow of 88 living in Thurmaston, Leicestershire, wept as she put the ring back on her finger. She said it was the perfect way to remember her husband, who had died 15 years earlier. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 28 Jan 2008.*

Anthea Capewell's wedding ring flew off her finger as she shut her garden gate in Stapleford, Nottinghamshire, in 1976. A careful search failed to find it, and it was still missing when she and her husband David moved to nearby Bilborough in 1984. They stayed in touch with neighbours Don and Carol Rigby. The ring resurfaced in July 2009, after 33 years, when Mrs Rigby pulled up a dandelion beside the hedge that separated the two gardens and found it clinging to the roots. Inspired by the find, Anthea and her husband planned to renew their wedding vows, witnessed by their three children and 11 grandchildren. *D.Express, D.Mirror, 22 July 2009.*

Back in 2002, Norma Welker of Shelby, Montana, took off her wedding ring while she was arranging flowers from her garden. A phone call distracted her and she didn't realise the ring was missing until after she had tidied up. She searched her compost pile with no luck and figured the ring was gone forever. In the spring of 2010, she decided her garden was too difficult to maintain and asked her grandson Nick Welker to till it so she could plant grass. Welker found the ring and returned it to his grandmother on her 80th birthday. *[AP] 14 Oct 2010.*

Some time in the 1970s, Janet Hollingworth was working in the grounds of Devizes Castle in Wiltshire planting conifers when she unearthed a mourning ring engraved with the name Lady Ann Elizabeth Hare. She took it to the town's museum, but the name was not known locally. Now, 40 years later, Miss Hollingworth, 64, has traced the Hare family to Norfolk and returned the ring to Lady Rose Hare, who still lives on the family's vast estate near Downham Market. The ring belonged to Sir Thomas Hare and was dedicated to his wife, who died in 1823 after undergoing an operation. Several years later, while returning from visiting his late wife's family in the west country, Sir Thomas stopped overnight at Devizes Castle and lost the ring somewhere in the grounds. *Western Daily Press, 24 Oct 2011.*

SIDELINES...

MERMAID MENACE

Terrified workers have refused to finish building two new reservoirs near the towns of Gokwe and Mutare in Zimbabwe because they claim they are being menaced by mermaids. Water resources minister Samuel Nkomo said: "We even hired whites thinking our boys did not want to work, but they also returned." He said the only way to solve the problem was to brew traditional beer and carry out rites to appease the spirits. *D.Mail, Metro, 7 Feb 2012.*

DIRE WARNING

According to a "scientific" report by Saudi Arabia's highest religious council, repealing the ban on women drivers would "provoke a surge in prostitution, pornography, homosexuality and divorce". Within a decade of the ban being lifted, there would be "no more virgins" in the desert kingdom. In another ruling, women with "tempting" eyes may be forced to cover them up. *Sun, 19 Nov; D.Mail, 2 Dec 2011.*

TAKING A TUMBLE

A Saudi man and his family suffered moderate injuries when their car overturned near the town of Hail in Dubai. When police found nail clippings and hair tied together and wrapped in a handkerchief under a car seat, they concluded that the accident had been caused by black magic. Suspicion fell on the family's maid, even though she was in the car when it overturned. *Emirates 24/7, 2 Sept 2011.*

O ROMEO, ROMEO!

Pope Benedict XVI could be assassinated within the next year, Cardinal Paolo Romeo, Archbishop of Palermo, has reportedly warned. The prediction, as reported in Italian paper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, was allegedly made by the cardinal on a visit to China last November. The Vatican said the report was "so incredible we cannot comment". *D.Telegraph, 11 Feb 2012.*

CLASS ACTION

AN UNEXPLAINED NERVOUS AILMENT AFFLICTS STUDENTS AT A NEW YORK STATE HIGH SCHOOL

LE ROY
JR/SR HIGH SCHOOL

MAX SCHULTE / ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

ABOVE: Pupils attending the high school where strange, uncontrollable twitches, jolts and shouts have been reported.

A bizarre sudden-onset disorder exhibiting Tourette's-like symptoms in 18 teenage girls and one boy attending Le Roy High School in north-western New York State has caused a sensation and baffled doctors. The first case was in May 2011, the second in early September. By the end of October, eight students were affected and the New York State Department of Health was called in to investigate.

By then there was also an adult victim: Marge Fitzsimmons, 36, a nurse in the town with no direct ties to the school.

Several of the girls reported that the symptoms seemed to come out of nowhere – one minute they were asleep, the next they had woken and developed uncontrollable movements and shouting. Their tics could be dramatic: arms twitching or jolting out to one side, speech chopped up by nonsense utterings, head jerking, eyes blinking. Some girls also had blackouts and seizures.

The school was built in 2003 and has about 630 students. School officials commissioned air-quality testing in late December, measuring levels of 58 volatile organic chemicals, 63 pesticides and herbicides, 11 metals, cyanide, polychlorinated biphenyls and ketones. They found nothing amiss. They also found no evidence of fungus or mould and no problems with ventilation. Water was tested at two locations inside the school as well as at the point where the municipal supply enters the school, and the water quality seemed to be fine.

> **Girls woke to uncontrollable movements and shouting**

Eight of the girls were diagnosed with conversion disorder (otherwise known as mass psychogenic illness, or what used to be called "mass hysteria"). Three of the girls had reported prior tic problems. Cases of conversion disorder generally occur among people who are in close contact with each other. Usually there is a trigger, such as a smell, and then one person becomes ill, followed by many others. Typically, the sickness seems to be organic, but no physical cause is identified. Females are affected more often than males. In such cases, the symptoms are distinct: for instance, seizures occur without characteristic changes in an electroencephalogram. However, the Le Roy situation doesn't really fit the conversion disorder diagnosis: the cases emerged over many months, and the students ranged in age from 13 to 19 years, and were in five different grades. They didn't spend time with each other and, at first, were not aware of each other's symptoms – although, later, social websites may have led to some mimicry.

There is growing awareness that a bacterial infection – pædiatric acute-onset neuropsychiatric syndrome (PANS) – can lead to sudden-onset tics. The syndrome is thought to be an auto-immune disorder. Again, however, these Le Roy students' cases don't quite fit: none reported a serious infection immediately before the symptoms set in; they are older than is typical for the disorder; PANS usually affects boys more than girls; and it

SIDELINES...

THE EYES HAD IT

During Mass in the church of Sant Andrea in Viareggio, Italy, on 2 October, about 300 congregants witnessed British-born Aldo Bianchini, 46, gouge out his eyes as the priest began his sermon. He "tore at his face" before screaming and collapsing in a pool of blood. He told doctors he "heard voices" ordering him to do it. His eyeballs could not be re-attached. *Metro, 3 Oct 2011*.

JUMP START

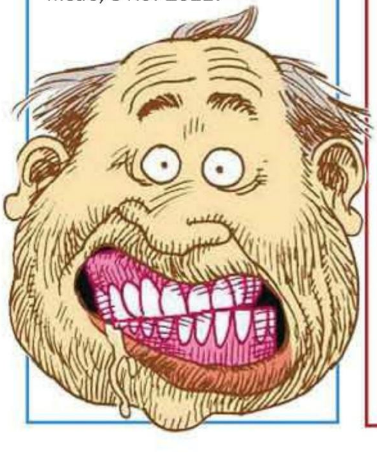
Raymond Kemp, 55, has hair growing on his head for the first time in years, following a bungee jump in Exmouth, Devon. *People, 11 Dec 2011*.

EEL BATH A COCK-UP

Zhang Nan, 56, had been told that bathing with live eels would make him look years younger because they nibbled off layers of dead skin. He bought 10 from a local market in Honghu, Hubei province, and tried it at home; but one disappeared up his penis and swam into his bladder. The 6in (15cm) eel was found dead after a three-hour operation. *Sun, 14 Sept; Metro, 15 Sept 2011*.

TOOTHLESS ORDEAL

After losing his teeth to gum disease, Eugene Przybylowicz waited 10 years for a set of false teeth from Poland's National Health Fund, only to find they didn't fit as his gums had changed shape. Now aged 63, he was told he would have to wait another 10 years for a replacement. *Metro, 3 Nov 2011*.



MARTIN ROSS

doesn't usually present in clusters. There is no definitive test for the condition, but to the extent that blood can hint at past infections, only some of the girls have evidence of recent bacterial infection.

Some suspect the students had been poisoned by a chemical spill – a line of inquiry being investigated by the celebrated environmental activist Erin Brockovich (who famously won a £210 million lawsuit after exposing a cover-up of contaminated drinking water in Hinkley, California, in 1993). In December 1970, Le Roy was the site of a train derailment that spilt a ton of cyanide crystals and more than 25,000 gallons (114,000 litres) of the industrial solvent trichloroethene (TCE). The spill site is 3½ miles (5.6km) from the school and, although there is groundwater contamination, it is well monitored and does not extend to the school area. However, some parents have reported an orange-yellow substance oozing up from the ground on the school sports field. Gravel from a quarry near the spill site was used to construct a playing field at the school; but water in the school was specifically tested for traces of TCE and levels were not elevated. Also, although TCE exposure has been linked to many conditions – for example, nausea, liver damage and cancer – tics are not among them. The only possible link is that it may increase the risk of another movement disorder, Parkinson's disease.

There was speculation that the human papillomavirus vaccine was involved; but only seven of the girls had received the vaccine (Gardasil) and, in each case, more than a year had elapsed between the last dose and the onset of symptoms. In any case, tics are not a known side effect of the vaccine.

Some of those affected have now recovered. School officials have approved further testing of both the air and the soil, but still insist that there is no danger to other students. *D.Telegraph, 28 Jan; Sun, 3+4 Feb; dailymail.co.uk, 3+8 Feb; Nature, 20 Feb 2012*. For more on this case, with personal histories of some victims, see: http://nyti.ms/wcHNBo (nytimes.com).

Fortean Times has reported many outbreaks of apparent "mass hysteria", most recently in **FT266:24–25, 268:22, 284:22.** For a detailed analysis of the 1980 marching band mass fainting in Hollinwell, Nottinghamshire, see **FT266:44–48.**

- Cody Hagel, 18, has suffered from Tourette's syndrome for the last four years, but until she conceived, her tics were confined to about 20 leg twitches and head jerks a day. She lives with her parents, Dwayne and Tanya, on their farm in North Dakota where they keep two donkeys, Oliver and Rachel. After falling pregnant in September 2011, Cody started braying like a donkey, sometimes more than 30 times a day. "It's a familiar sound on the farm so that probably explains why I have started to mimic it," she said. "It is embarrassing, but my family are very understanding. If people start looking awkward or staring it makes it worse, so they tend to act like it's completely normal." She has also started to shout "Yes!" and "Ha ha!" Her baby has a 50 per cent chance of developing the syndrome. *Metro, 14 Feb 2012*.

DARK VISION

A young Chinese boy who was born with brilliant blue eyes, like those of a Siamese cat, claims he can see in pitch darkness. To test his abilities, a Chinese journalist prepared a set of questionnaires which Nong Yousui, from Dahua, Guangxi province, was able to finish in a totally dark room. Video footage of Nong, of unknown age, first emerged in 2009, but has only recently been picked up online. He is said to struggle with bright sunlight.

In animals, night vision is made possible by the existence of a thin layer of cells called the *tapetum lucidum*. This is demonstrated in videos of leopards or other big cats taken at night, when their eyes literally glow in the dark. Nong's eyes are said to reflect neon green when a light is shone on them, but video footage does not appear to back up this claim – and experts insist such a feature in a human is impossible.

James Reynolds, a pædiatric ophthalmologist at New York State University, suggests Nong simply has very good eyesight rather than true night vision. "Evolutionarily, mutations can result in differences that allow for new environmental niche exploitation, but such mutations are modified over long periods," he said. "A functional *tapetum* in a human would be just as absurd as a human born with wings. It just can't happen."

Adam Hickenbotham, an optometrist and clinical researcher at University of California, Berkeley, said he believes Nong has a mild case of ocular albinism. This would explain the boy's lightly pigmented irises, and would also cause him to have a lower than usual amount of pigment in his retinas. This would make them appear slightly reflective, and would cause him to have difficulty seeing in bright light. *Life's Little Mysteries, 31 Jan; MX News (Sydney), 3 Feb 2012*.

SIDELINES...

HOT TICKET

The National Mustard Museum in Wisconsin has been given extra time to pay off a US$178,072 loan and ordered to take on 10 extra employees. *[UPI] 27 Jan 2012*.

STICKY SITUATION

Baffled Zhou Fen has apologised to everyone passing his home in Chongqing, China, to stop the 'hater' who has glued his front door shut more than 30 times. "I have no idea who I could have upset so badly," he said. *Metro, 23 Jan 2012*.

ISLAMIC RELIC

Ramzan Kadyrov, the eccentric and oppressive leader of Chechnya, claims to be the new owner of a bowl once used by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), allegedly presented to him by descendants of Ali (the Prophet's cousin) in London. A video shows him collecting the purported relic from a private jet at Grozny airport on 21 September and taking it to the city's grand mosque, allegedly the largest in Europe. *Guardian, 23 Sept 2011*.

DOGGONE

Phil Newton, 30, saw a double-decker bus driving down a street in Darwin, Australia, with a dog at the wheel. He chased after the vehicle, leapt through an open window and jammed on the handbrake just before it hit a parked car. Richard McCormack, 62, who uses the bus as a mobile home, had popped into a shop for a moment, time enough for Woodley, his two-year-old German koolie dog, to release the handbrake and go for a 200m (220-yard) spin. *[UPI] 20 Nov 2011*.

A REAL LEG-PULL

On 18 November, someone entered chicken breeder Bill Haggard's property at Jimboomba, Queensland, and tore the legs off six hens. Autopsies confirmed they had not been attacked by foxes, dogs or carpet pythons. The legs had not been cut, but wrenched off while the birds were still alive. *(Brisbane) Courier-Mail, 19–20 Nov 2011*.

SIDELINES...

LOAF SAVER

Liz Douglas, 51, lost control of her Nissan car on a bend during a violent rainstorm near Glasgow and it flipped over. Her life was saved when a white sliced Hovis loaf was thrown from a bag on the back seat and became wedged between her head and the roof of the car (for some reason the airbags didn't inflate). The bread was still in place when firemen arrived to cut her free. The car was a write-off. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 26 Nov 2011*.

HOLEY MOLEY!

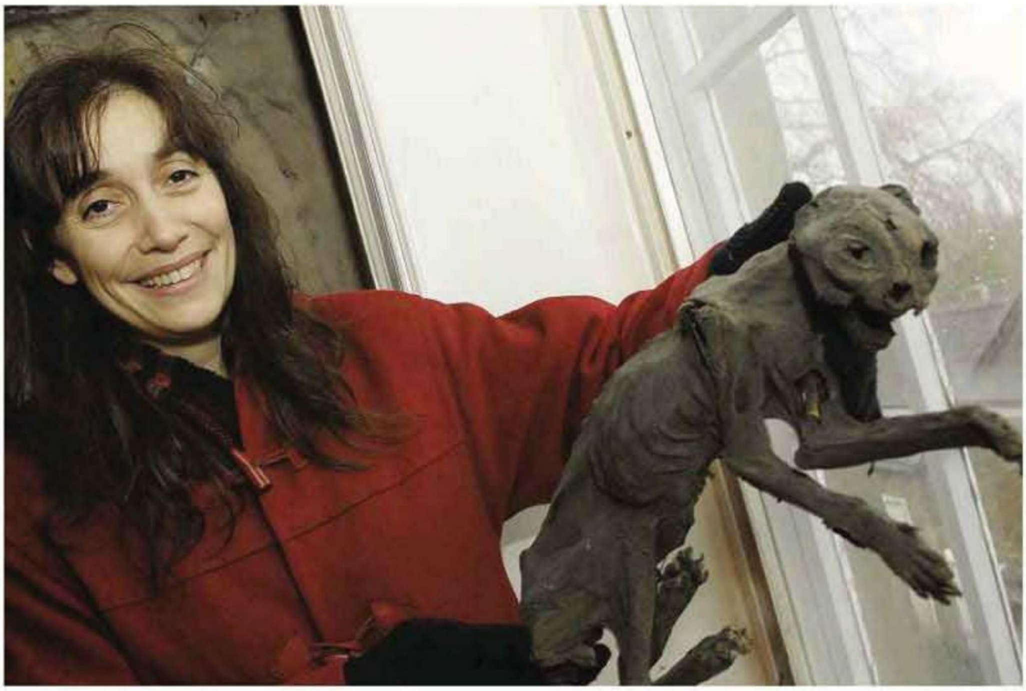
Stafani Ingamells, 199, of Scarborough, North Yorkshire, has been diagnosed with trypophobia, a fear of holes. "The other day I saw a group of straws pointing upwards and I was terrified," she said. "I also hate Crunchies, but my biggest fear is crumpets. My first reaction is to destroy the crumpet, but then I have a strong urge to run away." *Sunday Times, 18 Dec 2011*.

SEAL'S VISIT

A baby fur seal wriggled through the cat door of a house in New Zealand, climbed some stairs and settled on a sofa in the kitchen, where it was found by the stunned resident, Annette Swoffer, who lives on a busy road several hundred metres from Tauranga Harbour on the North Island. The seal ignored a dog and cat and was on the sofa for 45 minutes before being netted and returned to the sea. *MX News (Sydney), 14 Dec 2011*.

MARTIN ROSS

I TAWT I TAW A PUDDY-TAT



ROSSPARRY.CO.UK

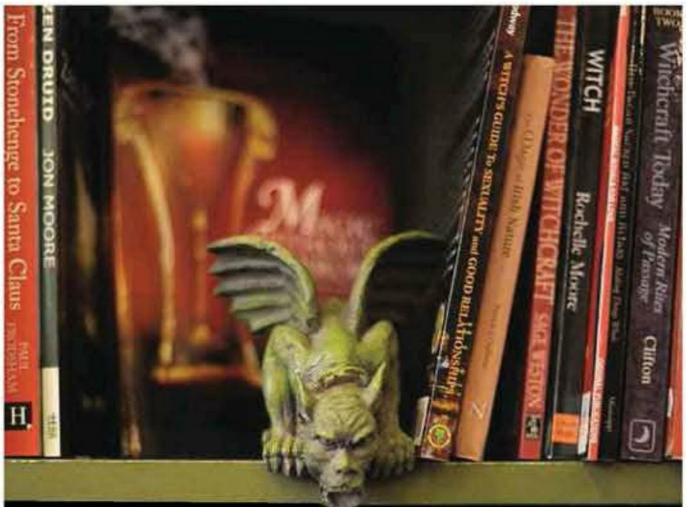
ABOVE: George Hartley found a mummified cat while renovating an 18th-century house in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire.

Property renovators Andrew and George Hartley were removing ceilings from an 18th-century house in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, when a mummified cat fell on them. Dead cats have long been placed in cavity walls, roof spaces, chimney-breasts and below floorboards and windowsills to protect the household and ward off evil spirits, witches, the evil eye, fire, vermin, or indeed any threat. More than 100 dried or mummified cats have been found in old buildings in Britain, but the actual number of immured cats is probably much higher as many people either wouldn't know who to report the discovery to or wouldn't want to anyway.

"During the renovation work, we have also found remains of lots of dried onions around the house, again signs of warding off unwelcome spirits," said Mrs Harley, confusingly called George. "We don't know if this cat would have been put up in the roof before it died, but it has no teeth which indicates it was an old cat that had died – or perhaps it lost its teeth trying to get out of the space. Since we have had it, already the body has started to soften since being exposed to the elements. It had obviously been perfectly preserved up there. We're not sure what we'll do with it now, but maybe we should bury it back in the foundations of the house where it came from." *dailymail.co.uk, 27 Jan; Sun, 28 Jan 2012.*

In April 2009, a 400-year-old mummified cat, this time with teeth intact, was found inside the wall of a house in Ugborough, near Plymouth in Devon. Funeral director Richard Parson, who owned the property, said: "The builders were stripping one of the bathrooms upstairs and this cat came to light. It is quite scary-looking and is a lot bigger than a normal domestic cat. I cannot throw it away so we plan to put it back on completion of the building work. But my wife is not all that keen on it, as she says she will have bad dreams." Neighbours told him a previous resident had found the cat 20 years earlier, but put it back. *D.Telegraph, 22 April 2009. For other cat mummy guardians, see* ***FT52:6–7**, **75:13**, **77:7**, **286:8**.*

About 300 years ago, a mummified cat was entombed in an airtight brick-lined chamber, apparently custom-built for it, in Woburn Abbey, the seat of the Dukes of Bedford. It was discovered in 1915 during the demolition of an outhouse and was donated to the Natural History Museum by the family. One of the best-preserved examples ever found, even its whiskers are intact. It had had all its internal organs and bodily fluids removed, suggesting that there had been a deliberate attempt to preserve it. "It is very likely that the cat was one of the estate mousers, and was probably a very good one," said Richard Sabin, curator of mammals at the museum. "It was buried in the foundations to protect the building against rodents and infestation." After being kept in storage for 90 years, it formed part of a 2005 exhibition of "naturally mummified" animals, including Egyptian cats. The Natural History Museum once found a mummified cat under its own entrance, and another turned up during renovations of a house in Knightsbridge. *D.Mail, Independent, 10 Feb 2005*.



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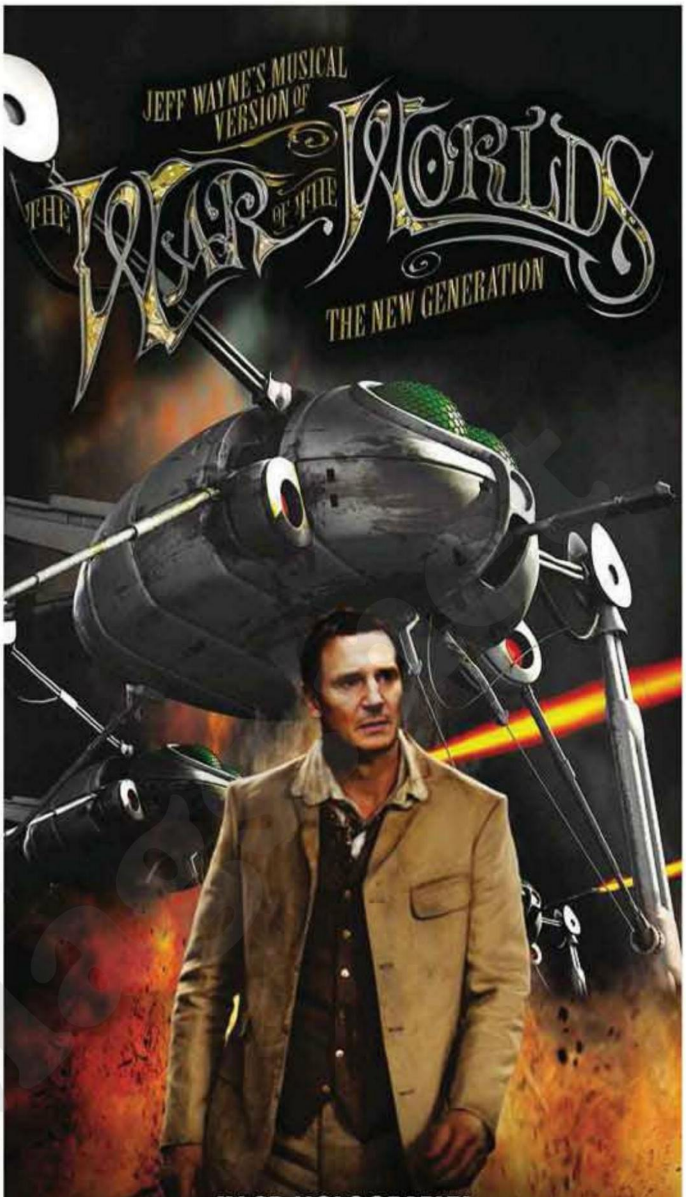
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THE RETURN OF THE GREASY MEN

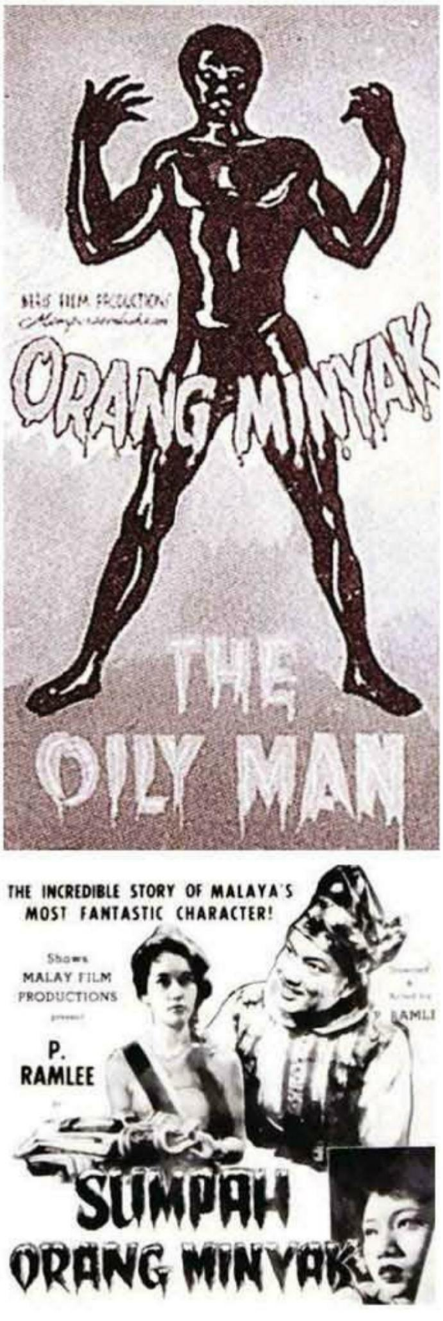
BOB RICKARD reports on the recent outbreaks of mass panic in Malaysia's capital city as rumours spread of uncatchable, oil-covered demons that prey on young females.

As the old year drew to a close in Malaysia's great metropolis of Kuala Lumpur (KL), residents of Gombak – the city's eastern district – feared they were under attack by a supernatural menace. In the early hours of 29 December 2011, half a dozen groups of men and boys, armed with spotlights and makeshift bludgeoning implements and *parangs* (machetes), patrolled the streets of Kampung Laksamana, a largely Malay and Indian residential area. They were on the lookout for a legendary evil that was an affront to their Muslim principles. Rumours were flying that the 'Oily Man' – in Bahasa Melayu, *Orang Minyak* – was back to molest their daughters.

The term *orang minyak* conjures up several different images for a modern Malaysian and, culturally, all are in play in the current folklore. To clarify, although *minyak* is popularly translated as 'oily', the oil referred to is the thick black sludge westerners would call 'grease'. The modern image of a Greasy Man (GM), as one of our sources described him, is a human burglar who strips down to his underpants and coats himself in grease before entering houses. You would think that the coating of grease – which is supposed to make him (in Fort's word) 'uncatchable' – would also make it difficult for the burglar to grasp things, leave a trail of foot and finger prints, and increase the likelihood of him slipping on the floor in a hasty exit. No wonder, then, that since the 1960s, this ludicrous criminal has become a staple of Malaysian comedies as well as lurid thrillers.

An older, more sinister version was introduced to Malaysians in the 1958 Malay-language black-and-white movie *Sumpah Orang Minyak* ('The Curse of the Oily Man'), directed by Malaysia's beloved *auteur* P Ramlee, who also wrote, directed and starred in it. It dramatised the story of a lame shaman who seeks magical powers from the devil; in return he must rape a number of virgins within a set period (in this movie 21 virgins in a week). To accomplish this vile deed, the man gains the uncanny abilities to locate virgins and to pass through walls. A blogger on *Yahoo News* described a classic GM scare in Butterworth, Penang, when, after a spate of burglaries, a family's black dog was killed in the belief that it was a GM that had taken animal form.

Three 'Islamic faith healers' – the politically correct way to describe the modern, state-sanctioned version of the old *bomoh*, or shaman – consulted by the *Star* newspaper, gave further variants: one said that an *orang minyak* is created when a black magic ritual goes wrong and the spell could only be reversed by raping the virgins. The second said that the GM cannot use violence to evade capture and so relies on 'oil' and magic. The third simply said that the only *orang minyaks* that have been captured turn out to be thieves or folk with mental health problems.



LEFT: Publicity material for P Ramlee's popular 1958 film *Sumpah Orang Minyak*.

They were clad only in their underwear and drenched in oil

Over time, these versions coalesced with the much older, supernatural legend that inspired Ramlee; that the Greasy Man is a demon, a *djinni*, and the minion of a sorcerer. The modern Greasy Man is more of a mix of Spring-heeled Jack and Dracula and is credited with incredible feats of agility in his escapes – prodigious bounds, super stealth and super wall-climbing ability. He avoids mirrors and can crawl across ceilings and climb up the slenderest cotton thread. He might also have familiars in the form of demon insects (Malay: *pelesit*). Significantly, the flap in Sri Lanka last September – when mobs hunted for the almost identical *Grease Yakas* (greasy devils) – also involved both mundane and supernatural elements [see **FT281:46–49**]. There is a large Tamil population in Malaysia and there may well be some cross-cultural migration of this folklore.

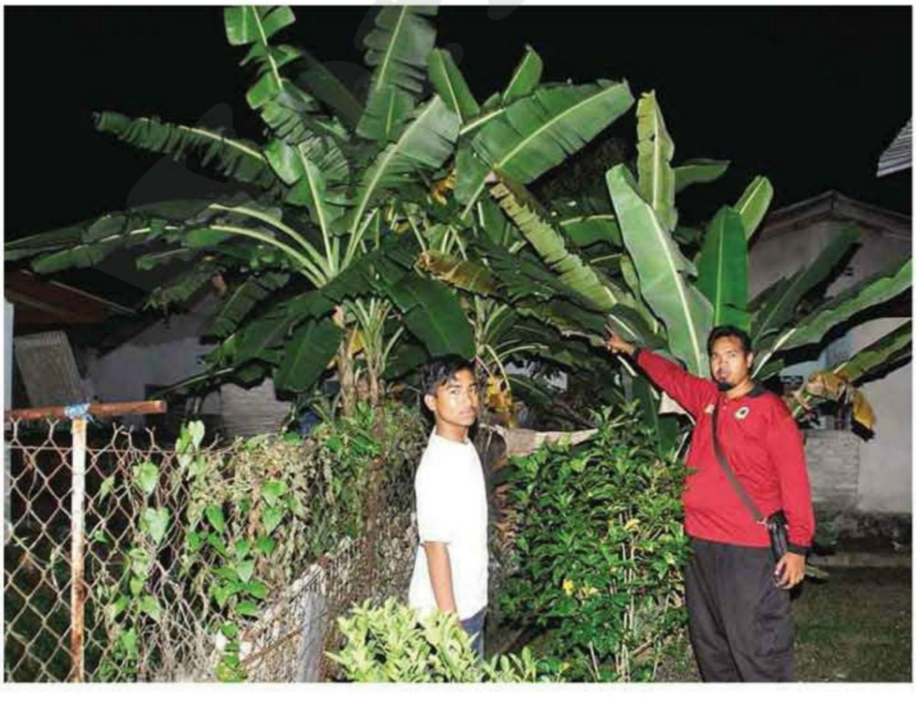
Kampung Laksamana is a sub-district of the Gombak quarter of the northern part of Kuala Lumpur city and in the week before Christmas, several hundred residents patrolled the streets in groups of five to 10 people. Although they made jokes about it to each other, the atmosphere was very edgy. In the previous 10 days, rumours had circulated within the community of encounters with two different GMs. Villagers claimed to have seen them, "clad only in their underwear and drenched in black shiny oil, jumping from one roof to another with ease".

Aslam Khan, 33, shrugged off a reporter's amusement, earnestly describing his sighting of both GMs: "One was tall, stocky and bald while the other was thin and curly-haired. I saw the bald *orang minyak* hiding behind the water tank of a house at about two in the morning. It was breathing really loudly, like a cow. It was black and shiny. When I shone my light on it, the thing stuck out its head to look back at me. Before I could do anything, it climbed up the roof and disappeared," he said.

It's clear that their prolonged anxiety and lack of sleep (most still had to go to work after their nightly patrols) was affecting the villagers' imaginations; they were seeing signs of

ABOVE: Bottles of oil found in an empty house on the Laksamana estate; locals believed this was where the *orang minyak* conducted his transformation ritual.
BELOW: Did an odd tear in the leaf of a banana tree reveal the *orang minyak*'s presence? There is a belief that the greasy men suck water from the banana bud.

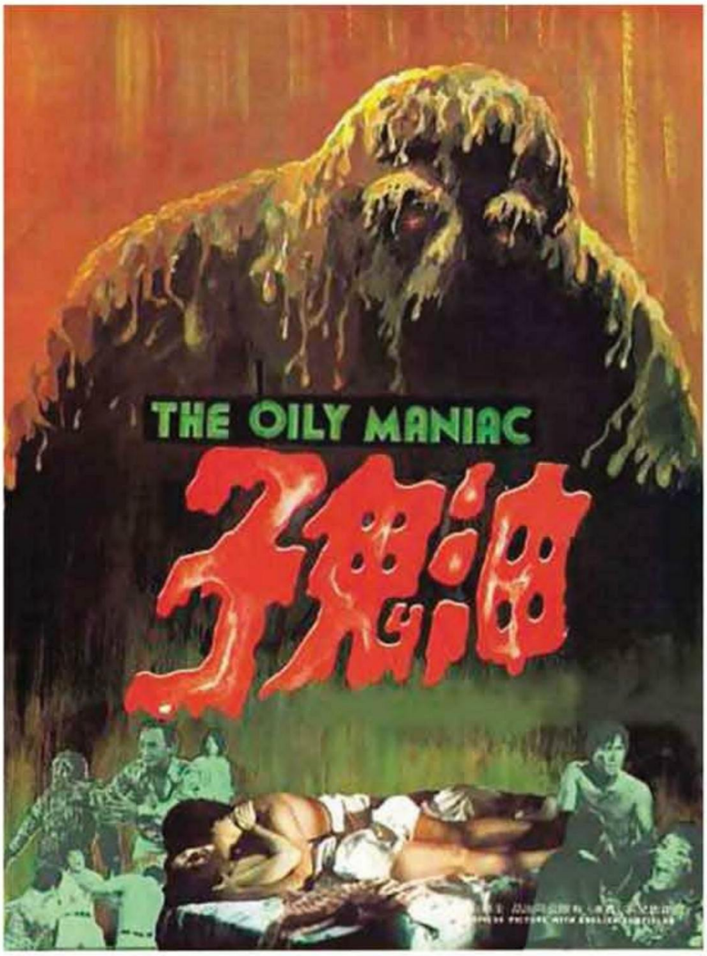
demonic activity everywhere. Khan, for example, said that after chasing what they believed to be a GM into some bushes nearby, they found "a large oil patch" where, he explained, the GM "had conducted its ritual of reciting *jampi* [a chanted spell] during its oil bath". Residents were now sleeping with all their house lights on, and had called in some "alternative healers" for prayer meetings "almost every night to ask for protection from the 'evil spirits'". Zaki Zainudin, 42, showed a reporter some snaps, on his phone, of the oil stains and a footprint; "proof of the existence of the *orang minyak*", he said. He also had a photo of an odd tear in the leaf of a banana tree. (There is a belief that the *orang minyak* gains its strength from sucking out the water from the *jantung pisang* [banana bud].) He broke off to glance around nervously as a dog began to howl nearby.



What made the villagers most anxious was the belief that the *orang minyak* would target the young girls of the neighbourhood. Kamal Bahari Satar, 36, said he was moving his family out of the neighbourhood for a while after five disturbing days that began when his 17-year-old sister-in-law had a frightening encounter. She saw the GM several times inside their house and, once, at night, "felt 'someone' caressing her and calling her to go out of the house". On Christmas Eve, the GM "locked the family out of the house" forcing Satar to break down the door. When they eventually entered, he told a reporter: "We saw a black heap underneath the kitchen table. When other residents poked it with a bamboo stick, we could see bloodstains." The GM (or whatever it was) then fled to a neighbour's house. The police are said to have later found "black footprints" outside their house.

Satar's decision to evacuate his family was based on another piece of the *orang minyak* folklore – a barely articulated fear that the GM can hypnotise its victims at a distance and subject them to its will. The paradox of an entity that can effortlessly enter a bedroom to molest a girl, yet needs to 'call' its victim to come outside is one we meet repeatedly in other accounts, including cases of 'mass hysteria' involving especially (but not exclusively) school-aged females. Satar's statement that "only female family members could see the *orang minyak*" is a significant detail. In 1981, *FT*'s Malaysian correspondent, Ahmad Jamaludin, reported that a large group of girls attending a court case in Kuantan, in Pahang state, went into collective hysteria on two consecutive nights. They later spoke of seeing "a disembodied black hand" that waved at them and beckoned them. It seemed to draw the students towards it and, they said, their efforts to resist "the mysterious pull" caused them to scream and faint. In a similar (unfortunately, undated) incident in Malacca, a group of female students were terrorised by a disembodied 'black hand' that crept in through their dormitory window.

These serve to illustrate the deep-seated fear among the susceptible and the credulous (not just in Malaysia) of being hypnotised 'telepathically', or at a distance, resulting in a loss of will. We see this particularly in stories about 'hypnosis' robberies in which the victim said they felt compelled and helpless as they handed over their valuables. Satar's sister-in-law was so shocked by the whispered commands she heard that she had to be treated with "alternative therapies" (a coded reference for a cleansing or exorcism ritual conducted by a *bomoh*, a Malay shaman). "Thankfully, she has recovered," Satar added, "but we do not want to take any chances as I also have a 22-year-old younger sister."



LEFT: A lurid film poster; the *orang minyak* has made numerous screen appearances.
BELOW: A posse of Laksamana locals hope to catch the GM with a large net.

A succession of neighbours among the impromptu patrols told reporters that they too have seen the GM outside or opposite their house, or lurking near an abandoned house (of which there are many in Malaysian housing projects). A typical statement is that the speaker was sceptical about *orang minyaks* in general, but became convinced when a neighbour, friend or family member said *they* had spotted one. P Mohan said he had seen it "crawling up the stairs of the house opposite, just like Spider-Man. When it reached the top it suddenly jumped onto the roof. I don't think a human could do that. It then just disappeared," he added with a shudder. "The hair on my hands just stood up. We can laugh and joke about it, but this is serious." K Chandran said he had not seen the menace, but was afraid that it would harm his 14-year-old daughter after hearing that it had appeared in the abandoned house next to his. "I'm scared now. All of us sleep in the hall with the lights on," he said. He'd even had additional lights installed.

K Paramasivam, an office worker who admits to seeing the bald *orang minyak* on the roof of an abandoned house, declared that the panic had had one benefit. In neighbourhoods such as this one, racial tensions between Malay and Indian residents tend to be subsumed into a rivalry between their representative political parties. Under the present circumstances, Paramasivam pointed out, the crisis has actually brought residents together. He admitted never having really spoken to his neighbours before but, now, he had got to know them better. "Everybody is helping one another out and is friendlier with their neighbours now."

With that, the flap fizzled away and the bloggers, news and entertainment media moved in. In mid-January, the Malaysian *Star* news group produced a three-part documentary on the so-called 'Gombak Oil' case. Called *Elusive Trail: Orang Minyak*, it was aired on their SwitchUp.TV channel and can also be viewed on YouTube.

At about the same time, a Malay-language daily reported that an Islamic exorcism was performed on an unnamed area of Gombak, in KL. While not specifically mentioning the *orang minyak*, it shows another aspect of the relationship between oily substances and the *orang minyak* demon. The three practitioners of 'traditional medicine' told a reporter that there were at least five major *djinn* in the area. They were to be helped by a woman who was possessed, or went into a trance voluntarily (as a medium), or whom they put into a trance; the source in unclear. One by one, the *djinn* "entered" the woman's body and were called out by the *bomohs* to be imprisoned in a bottle containing oil. By the power of chanting the second verse of the 112th chapter of the *Qur'an* – the *Surat al-Ikhlas* – the "medical practitioners" (the current politically acceptable term) "arrested" 25 *djinn* in all, including the big five. "Oil is the incarnation of the *djinni*," explained one, meaning that the *djinni*, a spirit, could 'possess' the oil to gain a physical form and so could be trapped in it with the proper prayer.

Main sources: *The Star* (Asia News Network), *Kosmo!* (M'sia), 29 Dec 2011; *Sunday Star*, 1 Jan 2012. Malay language sources: *Utusan*, 18 Sept 2011; *Sinar Harian*, 16 Jan 2012. Blogs: *unknownkino.blogspot.com* 24 Nov 2009; *akudansesuatuz.blogspot.com* 18 Sept, *mummy-nemo.com* 19 Sept 2011; *greenboc.blogspot.com* Jan 2012. Sources for 'black hand' cases: 'Tales from Malaysia', **FT35:30–33** (1981) and 'Orang Minyak: sicko or rascal?' by Susan Tam, *Yahoo! Malaysia Newsroom*, 11 Dec 2011.

A CURIOUS FOOTNOTE

The Gombak *orang minyak* and its location in a part of KL called Laksamana is lexilinked to the auteur P Ramlee in two ways. He produced the 1958 film *Sumpah Orang Minyak*; and the last film made by him before his death in 1973 was *Laksamana Do Re Mi* (1972, based upon a tale from the *Thousand and One Nights*).

MORE SLIPPERY DJINN

THE *ORANG MINYAK* HAS ALSO BEEN MAKING HIS OILY PRESENCE FELT IN OTHER PARTS OF MALAYSIA

LEFT: Norlidah Hassan points to the spot where a supposed GM was seen in the Pingirran Batu Caves area on 18 September 2011. The inset and photo at right show the unfortunate suspect after being caught and beaten. **BELOW:** A patrol in search of GMs in Bentong.

The Gombak scare was prefigured but a number of other *orang minyak* incidents in other suburbs of KL city and outlying states.

CHOW KIT, KL

In February 2009, several women in the Chow Kit area in the centre of KL city complained that an *orang minyak* had been flashing his private parts at them for the last three months. In this case, the culprit was not a horny supernatural pest but a scruffy man in his 40s who had been under surveillance by the police for some time. The city's chief constable, Ku Chin Wah, confirmed the arrest. *The Star (Asia News Network), Kosmo! (M'sia), 7 Feb 2009*.

SUNGAI PETANI, KEDAH

In September 2009, similar fears affected about 300 families in Sungai Petani, in the northern state of Kedah. This scare began when 17-year-old Nurshahirah was woken up at 5:40am by a "warm sensation" on her left ear. Opening her eyes, she saw the apparition of a man with curly hair and a thick moustache standing by her bed. "I was even more shocked when the ghost took off his sarong (*kain pelikat*) and started to fondle himself," she said. She added that she thought "a charm" had been placed upon her, as she felt powerless to stop the bedroom visitor groping her body.

At about the same time, that same morning, Fatimah, 42, a housewife, said two of her daughters began crying, claiming they were woken up by someone molesting them. "At first I thought my 15-year-old daughter was talking in her sleep but she insisted that she was molested by a ghost before it moved to the kitchen," said Fatimah. "My 14-year-old said she managed to kick the dark apparition, who wore a *kain pelikat* and black singlet, when she felt her body being touched." When the girl screamed, the ghost ran out of her room, apparently. Fatimah chased it with a *parang* but the apparition disappeared. *The Star (Asia News Network), 18 Sept 2009*.

PINGGIRAN, KL

In September 2011, in the Pinggiran Batu Caves area of north KL, housewife Norlida Hassan, 42, heard "heavy breathing" outside her ground-floor flat around 2am one morning, and opened the door to investigate. She was immediately shocked by the sight of a near-naked dark-skinned man "enacting *silat* moves". (*Silat* is a stylised Malaysian martial art.) She screamed and when the stranger ignored her she called her husband who, in turn, gathered a few neighbours. The man, in his 20s, was caught after he fell into a drain while trying to make his escape. He was said to be mumbling "strange words" which, with his "dark skin" led to their belief he was an *orang minyak*. He was handed over to police in Gombak, where Assistant Chief Constable Abdul Rahim Abdullah said the unidentified man was Indonesian and now receiving treatment at Selayang Hospital for a mental disorder. *Kosmo! (M'sia), 19 Sept 2011*.

BENTONG, PAHANG

In Bentong, in Pahang state, the Ketari residential district – a community of around 10,000 – was in the grip of an *orang minyak* scare after rumours that several underage girls had been molested by a diminutive 'black' man. (NB: In Malaysia, any dark-skinned man might be described as 'black'.) This was in the first week of November 2011 – a month before the Gombak panic in KL, for which it may have been a model. Bands of vigilantes roamed the streets at night and were even joined by a senior police official. One young man on patrol told a reporter that, a couple of nights earlier, they had spotted a GM on the roof of a house and chased him. It seems they all jeered and laughed at the entity, but it escaped into buses and across a river.

The Bentong Acting District Police Chief, Deputy Superintendent Mohd Nor Mohamad Mansor, denied the existence of any horny demon, saying that local robberies and rapes were committed by regular human criminals. He said that in one case of burglary and two rapes of young girls, in June and October, the suspects arrested after investigation, were "ordinary people who happened to be wearing black clothes".

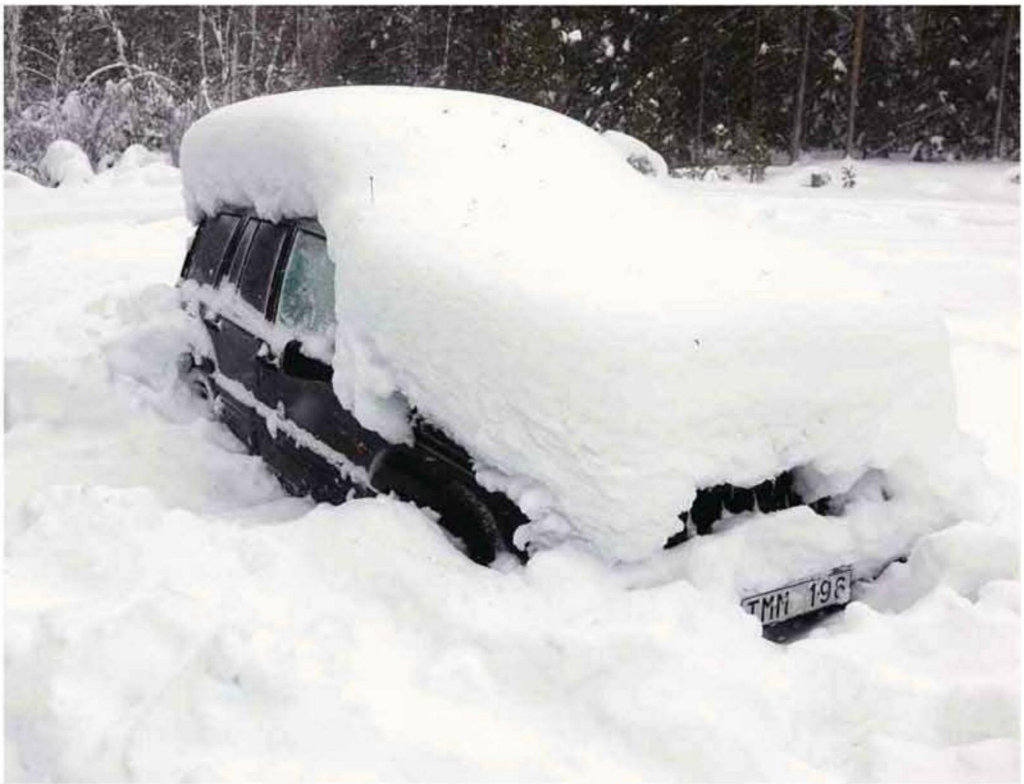
The *Mufti* (an Islamic jurist) of Pahang, Datuk Abdul Rahman Othman, warned the residents to be sure of their facts before taking vigilante action. However, he said, if it turns out to be "evil spirits or black sorcerers", people, "especially the Muslim community, must be vigilant." He recommended "a good community spirit", regular patrols, and "chanting and the Qur'an reading". *MyMetro (M'sia), Kosmo! (M'sia), 4 Nov 2011*.

SELAYANG, KL

Two areas of Selayang in northwest KL were alarmed by *orang minyak* rumours. In the early hours of 26 December 2011, a father heard his daughter scream. Rushing into her room, he was reportedly just in time to see the GM "disappearing" in front of him. Three days earlier there had also been a GM sighting (no details). *MyMetro (M'sia), 26 Dec 2011*.

LIVING IN THE WILDS

FORMER SOLDIER AND FORESTRY WORKER TAKES TO THE WOODS, PLUS A MAN SURVIVES A SWEDISH WINTER IN HIS CAR



REUTERS / SCANPIX SWEDEN

LEFT: The car in which Peter Skyllberg allegedly survived for 60 days, just below the Arctic Circle.
BELOW: "Wolfman" Wayne Morgan.

Police in Wales are hunting an eccentric hermit, dubbed "The Wolfman" by local children, who has been living in a dense forest for over four years, eating rabbits, plants and berries to survive. Wayne Morgan, 37, disappeared into the Pantyffynon Woods, near Ammanford, Carmarthenshire, in 2007, and hasn't been spotted in over a year. He has, however, left abandoned hideouts and a trail of fires used to cook meals. The woods are inaccessible in places and riddled with old mines. Local people have complained that he takes milk from their doorsteps, and it is thought that he scavenges from supermarket bins. He has used survival skills honed in the Army to evade capture on previous occasions, despite the use of sniffer dogs and helicopters with heat-seeking equipment. Police have renewed their efforts, worried that he could freeze to death, if he hasn't done so already. They have issued a photograph of the long-haired and heavily bearded loner. A member of his family said he became a woodland hermit after losing his job as a forestry worker. "He's been offered help with accommodation and food but doesn't want it," she said. "Last time I saw him, he was filthy. I can't understand why he is living like that." *BBC News, 7 Feb; Sun, telegraph.co.uk, 9 Feb; <i>, 11 Feb; holdthefrontpage.co.uk, 17 Feb 2012.*

He was too weak to utter more than a few words

WALES NEWS AND PICTURES

A Swedish man apparently survived for 60 days in a snow-covered car in temperatures as low as –30°C (–22°F), thanks to an "igloo effect". On 17 February, two traffic police on snowmobiles found the car buried in snow at the end of a forest track more than 1km (0.6 miles) from a main road near the northern town of Umeå, just south of the Arctic Circle. They assumed it was a wreck until they dug their way to a window and saw movement inside. Peter Skyllberg, 44, was huddled in a sleeping bag on the back seat. He was too weak to utter more than a few words, but said he had been in the car since 19 December and had not eaten anything since then, apart from snow. He initially refused to leave the car, saying he wanted to "hibernate", but Andreas Gidlund, one of his rescuers, convinced him he was at death's door and needed to go to hospital. The frost-covered interior of the car was littered with paper cups, tissues and empty cigarette packets. There were camping pans, rolls of kitchen towel, a large coolbox, and a bumper pack of extra-large nappies. The smell was appalling.

Dr Ulf Segerberg, chief medical officer at Norrland University Hospital, Umeå, said: "In the car he had very warm clothes, he had a warm sleeping bag and, as the car was snowed under, that would have made it more like an igloo. Down below the snow, you would normally have a temperature of around zero." He said it was not unusual for someone to survive such a period if they had access to water – although it was rare for someone to survive for so long outside in the Swedish winter. He estimated that Skyllberg could have lost more than 42lb (19kg).

A day after his discovery, Andreas Östensson, the proprietor of a local petrol station, said Skyllberg had been a regular customer since last summer, and was apparently in good health when he had disappeared towards the end of last year. "He drove here in his car," said Östensson. "Sometimes he filled the car and bought hot dogs, bread, cigarettes and coffee. He said that he lived in the forest and slept in the car. Of course I thought it was odd… I was wondering what he was doing all day. But on the other hand he was good looking, used camping clothes, shaved himself and had good hygiene."

Roger Vesterlund, from the local snowmobile club, said that one of the club's members had found the car in mid-January and reported it to the police. "All the doors were locked and he knocked on the windows and didn't see anything. He took the plate number and gave it to the police, but the police only confirmed that it was not stolen." Gidlund later stated that Skyllberg's car was never completely sealed shut as the right passenger door was only loosely covered with snow and he could have escaped had he wanted to; however, others involved in the rescue insist he was indeed trapped.

Skyllberg, from the central Swedish town of Karlskoga, had worked as a handyman for a local landlord and bought an apartment block from his employer with borrowed money. He poured his savings into renovating the property, but couldn't service the debt of £150,000, and last year it was repossessed. He had also broken up with his girlfriend. A friend said he had disappeared last May with debt collectors on his heels and had not been heard from since. *BBC News, 19 Feb; D.Telegraph, 20+21+22 Feb; Sunday Telegraph, 26 Feb 2012.*

Until recently, the orthodox medical view was that humans and other primates don't have hibernation mechanisms; but this has been challenged by experiments at Arizona University in a sealed artificial environment called Biosphere 2. Dr Roy Walford has studied what happens to human volunteers living in the Biosphere when the temperature is lowered, the level of oxygen in the atmosphere reduced and they are deprived of food – conditions similar to those in Skyllberg's car. After several months, he found that the volunteers' blood became better at retaining oxygen, thanks to a drop in levels of erythrocytes (red blood cells), which carry oxygen into the muscles and organs. Their heart rate and breathing became sluggish, but they did survive the challenging conditions. When Dr Walford reported the results in the *Journal of Gerontology*, he noted that the changes were characteristic of those found in hibernating animals. *D.Mail, 21 Feb 2012.*

2012 WATCH

PETER BROOKESMITH SPOTS AN OLD FACE EMERGING FROM THE WOODWORK

WIN MCNAMEE / GETTY IMAGES

IT'S PHYSICS – BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

Richard C Hoagland made himself famous in the 1990s as the diviner of the Face on Mars, and in 1997 had the pleasure of becoming an Ig Nobel laureate for his non-discovery. Unfazed by this, and by the disappearance of the Face in later high-resolution images from the red planet – and, no doubt, not wishing to lose his large audience of alien-watchers, New Agers and 'alter-natives' – Hoagland brewed up "torsion physics". This accounts for all sorts of things, among them the Arab Spring and What Will Happen on 21 December this year. Or does it?

Hoagland is much taken by the idea that the Sun will align with the galactic centre on that day. This will, apparently, create a "torsion field" between the Sun and the black hole at the centre of the Milky Way. According to Hoaglandian physics, that will reduce the mass of the Sun and, presumably, the rest of the Solar System, and then all kinds of weird stuff will go down.

Exactly what, isn't entirely clear to those on limited budgets. Hoagland's best revelations seem to lurk on DVDs, for which he charges dozens of dollars, for which one might have better uses. Hints indicate that solar flares will multiply, or perhaps the Earth's core will be put out of balance and cause a shift of the polar axis (world turns upside down). Or perhaps an inter-dimensional gateway will swing open and hordes of aliens will fly through it.

These are all favourite contenders for what we have to look forward to on 21/12, of course. Alternatively, as Hoagland's sidekick David Willcocks puts it, there'll be "a hyperdimensional jump out of our 3D space-time into 'a higher æthericdensity'." Who can say? Perhaps not even Hoagland. On a recent *Coast to Coast* broadcast, he admitted he had "no idea" what might happen.

There are, according to various killjoy mainstream scientists, certain difficulties with Hoagland's scenario, elusive as that is. One is that his version of hyperdimensional physics resurrects the 'ether', a notion found redundant by relativity theory. This kind of thing tends to get pushed, alive and squeaking, off the top of ivory towers in the groves of academe. Another obstacle to global recognition of Hoagland's genius is his concept of "torsion fields".

These are the very same "torsion fields" conjured up in the 1980s by a group of scientists led by Anatoly Akimov and Gennady Shipov, who managed to extract 500 million roubles from the Soviet government for research into their practical applications. These included "the long-range destruction of enemy strategic weapons without contact" and "psychophysical and biomedical influence on troops and the population".

Unfortunately, not even the theory works, and the 'scientists' were exposed as frauds in 1991. Hoagland, nonetheless, has found a way of measuring torsion fields by attaching an old Accutron watch to a MicroSet watch timer and a computer, which generates graphs. It has been unkindly pointed out that these fail to mention in what units they measure anything (if they do measure anything).

And finally, if you didn't already know, the Sun has been *roughly* in the region of the Galactic equator for about 30 years. It's currently about six degrees off-centre, but was actually at its closest in 1998. So: no alignment in 2012, no torsion-field effects, no big deal. So it goes.

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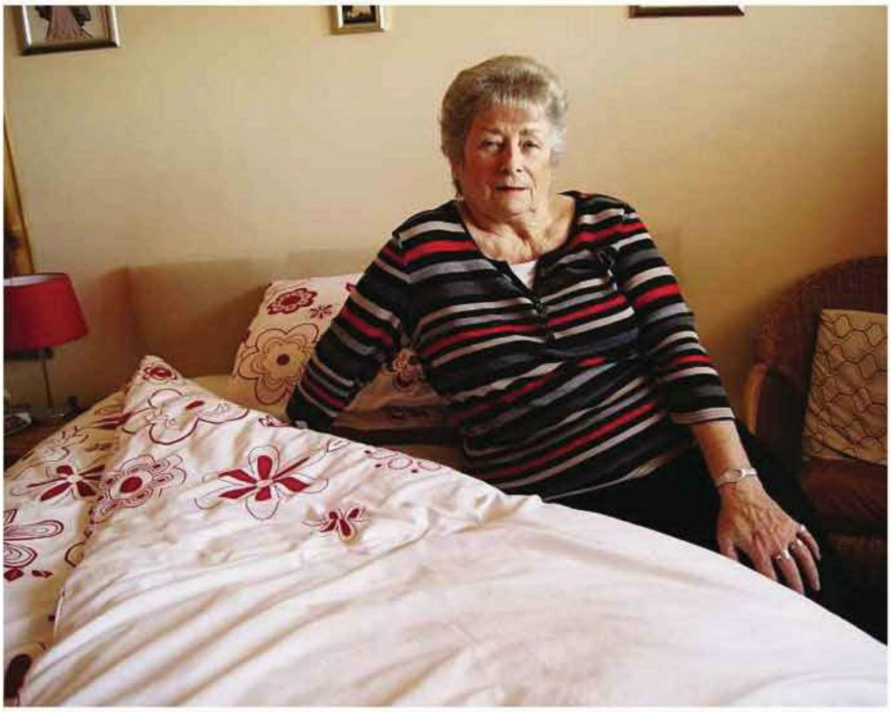
MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE on the sexy spectre of Nell Gwynne and the groping ghost of Herne Bay.



NORTHCLIFFE MEDIA

LEFT: 73-year-old Herne Bay resident Doris Birch, who has suffered assaults by an amorous entity she described as "like an octopus".

The recent exhibition by the National Gallery of a portrait of Nell Gwynne (or Gwyn) (1650–87), unseen by the public for some 50 years, generated a great deal of interest. The picture of the famous orange seller, actress and mistress of King Charles II had been considered too risqué in the Victorian era and was re-painted to match contemporary sensibilities. However, in the autumn of 2011 the restored version, showing "Mistress Eleanor Gwynn" almost naked to the waist, was selected by the National Gallery for promoting an exhibition on the history of women in the English theatre. Nell Gwynn was one of the first women to appear on stage and quickly became famous. Today she is recognised as having been "incredibly astute at manipulating her image and abilities", in the words of Gill Perry, the exhibition curator.

Just how successful the flamboyant Nell was with her publicity can be seen with her persistence in the national psyche with reports of her return as a ghost. Nell has the distinction of being one of the most popular female ghosts in folklore, second only to Queen Anne Boleyn. However, while Anne Boleyn has been a rare and infrequent ghost for generations, Nell's shade has been reported a number of times in the last 100 years, with at least two sightings linked with portraits of her.

The ghostly figure of "a most beautiful lady in a low-cut dress surrounded by a light which showed her jewels and a sweet expression in her eyes" was seen at St Albans, an old house on Hampton Court Road in London, the home of novelist Winifred Graham (1873–1950) in the early 20th century. The apparition was later identified by one witness from a photograph of a portrait of Nell Gwynne.

> **"I was lying in bed when I felt this creepy pair of hands," she said**

From the late 1950s through to the mid-1980s, the most infamous of Nell's haunts was the Gargoyle Club, a one-time artists' and gentleman's club in Soho. Described as a shadowy figure in a high-waisted dress and a flowered hat, she might well be expected – according to one author of ghost books – to have sympathy and understanding for women employed as hostesses and strippers in the Gargoyle Club's latter days. But two women working at the Gargoyle were badly scared when holding a candle-lit session with a Ouija board after hours. Both women felt a growing and menacing presence in the room, as the glass used as pointer moved increasingly wildly, producing a name that might have been a misspelling of Nell Gwynne. Then one of the pair fell into a trance and began mumbling, and the other, on hearing scratching noises from a locked fire escape, opened the window and screamed for help. Both women were eventually rescued from the building by the police. Mike Klinger, a former owner of the Gargoyle, also claimed to have seen a ghostly shrouded figure on the pavement by the club's Meard Street entrance.

Other sites reputedly haunted by Nell's ghost include Nell Gwynne's House at Newmarket, Suffolk, the former Phoenix Inn at Pewsey, Wiltshire, and the former manor house site at Hartwell, Northamptonshire. Also in Northamptonshire, Nell reputedly haunts both the house and orchard at Salcey Lawn, used as a royal retreat by Charles II. Here Charles supposedly had another of Nell's lovers murdered in a fit of jealousy, but there is absolutely no evidence of this beyond a bare tradition. As writer Joan Forman observed in 1974, Charles II was one of the few Stuart monarchs enriched by a sense of humour, and one agrees with her view that it is "much more likely he would have laughed the matter off or found an amusing way of humiliating his rival".

In the late 1960s, what were claimed as Nell Gwynne's spectre and ghostly laughter were haunting Salisbury Hall, near St Albans, Hertfordshire, owned by members of the Goldsmith family. The Goldsmiths said they were happy to have Nell as a visitor, with the *Daily Express* remarking in December 1967 that any manifestations "should add a real Christmassy touch to their family party this season".

Two years later, in October 1969, *Harper's Magazine* announced that the spirit of either Nell or her "illegitimate child" was believed responsible for poltergeist manifestations at Sudbrook Lodge, Surrey. Then in the early 1970s, Nell was reported again at Salisbury Hall, where she was seen wrapped in a blue fichu. This was identified by ghost author Jack Hallam as the fichu she was wearing in a portrait by Charles II's artist Sir Peter Lely, in which she appears stroking a lamb.

So it will be interesting to see if the recent display of her more revealing portrait influences the descriptions of her appearance in any future sightings.

Guardian, 7 Oct; *Country Life*, 16 Nov 2011; Joan Forman: *Haunted East Anglia*, 1974; Peter Underwood: *Haunted London*, 1973; Jack Hallam: *The Ghosts' Who's Who*, 1977; Steve Rout: *The Lore of London*, 2008; *D.Express,* 6 Dec 1967; *Harper's Magazine*, Oct 1969.

Far less pleasant than the shade of Nell Gwynne was a presence reported in *Herne Bay Times* in November 2011 under the headline "Herne Bay gran struggles to sleep because of groping ghost". A story in the paper and in the *Canterbury Times* revealed that 73-year-old grandmother Doris Birch, a former nursing assistant, was being disturbed by assaults from a ghost at her flat in Margaret Court in the Kent seaside town.

Ms Birch was quoted as saying: "It's like an octopus. It started four months ago. I was lying in bed when I felt this creepy pair of hands. I kicked frantically and it went away. Next time it came I hurled the duvet on to the floor! But the ghost keeps coming back. I've tried sleeping without the duvet. But it started shaking my mattress. I even threw the mattress off the bed and bought a new one, but it has made no difference."

To try and help resolve the situation, the press contacted what were described as "ghost hunters" Ray and Beryl Herne who live locally. Ray is described as a 52-year-old lorry driver who claims he can draw a ghost inside him, while his partner Beryl "will envelope it in a vortex of light and send it to the other side". It is difficult to know what to make of these assertions, but their involvement maintains the longstanding tradition of mediums working in pairs to rid premises of hauntings. Another example was the pre-World War II duo, Arthur Wyeth and Walter Neal, who operated in a similar way to the Hernes, one experiencing the ghost and the other effecting its release. Their most celebrated success was the supposed cleansing of a jellyfish-like entity haunting a mummy case lid at the British Museum in the 1920s (see Harry Ludlam, ed: *Elliot O'Donnell's Ghost Hunters*, 1971; JA Brooks: *The Good Ghost Guide*, 1994).

But it would be interesting to know what a less spiritually orientated investigator might have made of Ms Birch's experience, for instance whether a phenomenon such as sleep paralysis might provide an explanation. (See David J Hufford: *The Terror That Comes by Night*, 1982.) As veteran researcher Dr Donald West pointed out over half a century ago in his sober work *Psychical Research Today* (1962), each person who investigates a spontaneous case is likely to bring along an existing set of preconceptions and assumptions, including that s/he is the person best qualified to deal with the situation. It is easy to imagine how a believer in alien abductions might have interpreted this report!

Tony Guida, 57, a painter and decorator from Greenhill, Sussex, believes he has the answer to Mrs Birch's spooky persecution: disrespect shown to human remains. As a youth, he was working on the foundations of Margaret Court when workmen unearthed a human skull and some bones. The foreman didn't want to slow the work as it was a big job, so the bones were buried again in the cement.

In fact, a refreshing note of caution in this case was shown with the reaction by Methodist Minister Hugh-Nigel Sheehan, 68, of Mortimer Street's United Church, who was quoted as saying: "I was approached by Mrs Birch but I fear I am not in a position to help. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. I have no expertise in this at all. I am neither a trained counsellor nor from a church with a tradition of exorcism such as the Catholic Church. It is very difficult to know how to respond."

However, a Methodist Minister interested in assisting might well turn to inspiration from the history of Methodism itself, and the story of the haunting of Epworth Rectory, Lincolnshire, in 1716. The Rectory was the family home of John and Charles Wesley, the co-founders of Methodism; indeed, it marked the start of a long tradition of poltergeist outbreaks in nonconformist households, several of which became classics, as noted by the writer Sacheverell Sitwell.

Sources: *Herne Bay Times*, 19 Nov, 15 Dec 2011; Sacheverell Sitwell: *Poltergeists*, 1940.

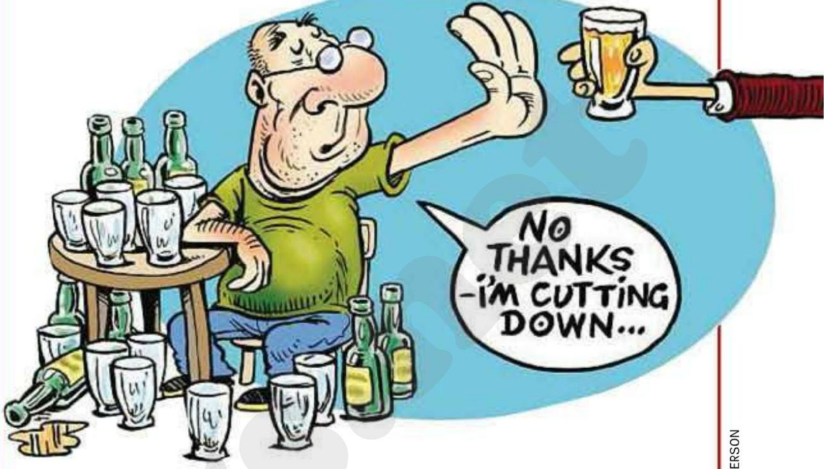
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

153. THE TIDAL WAVE OF BOOZE

The myth

The British are drowning in a sea of alcohol. We're drinking more than ever, every year.


NO THANKS -I'M CUTTING DOWN...

HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

Even the most sceptical *FT* reader might be forgiven for thinking that British alcohol consumption is on the rise, after years of non-stop media coverage of teenage drunkenness and the supposedly NHS-bankrupting effects of "binge culture". But the official figures are clear: Britons have been drinking less booze every year since 2002. The annual survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics, covering England, Scotland and Wales, shows this drop applying to both sexes and every age group. Men aged 16–24, for instance, had an average weekly consumption of 26 units in 1999, and 15 units in 2009. ONS numbers are based on self-reporting, but even the British Beer and Pubs Association's sales-based figures find a continuing year-on-year drop, so far totalling 13 per cent since a 2004 peak. Given the dates, these findings can't be explained by reference to the commonly observed rise and fall of booze sales during booms and recessions. UK alcohol consumption has fallen significantly over the last couple of centuries, but began rising again in 1947. Current levels are still considerably higher than those of 20 years ago.

Sources

http://bbc.in/faHzD6 (BBC);
The Hutchinson Softback Encyclopaedia (Helicon, 1996).

Disclaimer

The argument over whether or not some people drink *too much* is outside this column's purview; the point here is that Britons' alcoholic consumption on average has fallen and is falling – unless you can prove otherwise, in which case the letters column is, as ever, open 24 hours a day and fully licensed for music and dancing.

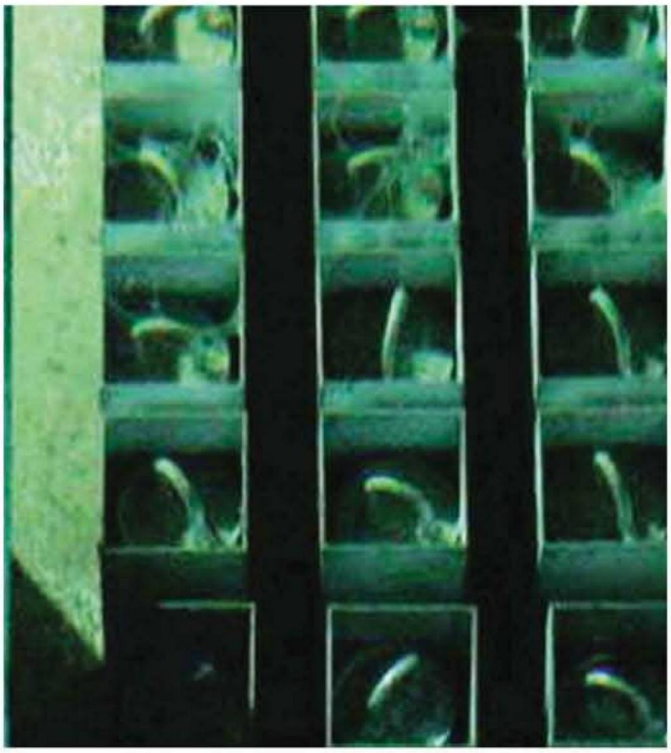
Mythchaser

The entire composing-room of *The Times* was sacked in 1817, after the paper reported that "The royal party then pissed over the bridge". A reader asks simply: myth or not? **Editor's note:** Different versions of this yarn specify Queen Victoria "pissing over" Waterloo Bridge, Clifton Suspension Bridge or the Forth Rail Bridge; Victoria, of course, didn't become queen until 1837. The newspaper cited is either *The Times* or the *Manchester Guardian*.

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

MISCELLANEOUS

Atomic webs, a number with a bad rep, Little People get back at business tycoon, a Victorian villain revived, plus a bogus pachyderm.



SWNS

NUCLEAR SPIDERS?

In January, workers at a US nuclear waste facility discovered a bizarre white cobweb on uranium. Could it have been made by a 'mutant' spider? The white 'string-like' material (above), never seen before on nuclear waste, was found among thousands of spent fuel assemblies submerged in deep pools. An official report concluded: "The growth, which resembles a spider web, has yet to be characterised, but may be biological in nature… further evaluation still needs to be completed." The bizarre growth echoes the plot of *Spider-Man*, where Peter Parker becomes a superhero after being bitten by a radioactive spider at a science exhibition.

The webs were found at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina, a 300-square-mile (780 sq km) nuclear clean-up facility owned by the US Department of Energy. They were on fuel stored in a compound with 3ft (90cm)-thick concrete walls and pools that range from 17ft to 30ft (5–9m) deep. Organisms with a natural resistance to radiation are said to be radioresistant, and do exist. "The water in the spent fuel pools is maintained at a certain pH [acid/alkili balance] and temperature," said Osman Kemal Kadirolu, a former professor of nuclear engineering at the University of Istanbul. "If micro-organisms enter into the pool they might have a chance to live. The radiation field near a spent fuel assembly is very large and will definitely disturb the normal life cycle of the micro-organisms – though I am sure you would not get monsters like the ones that come out of the Sea of Japan in Japanese horror movies." *Sun, 6 Feb 2012.*

CURSE OF 39

Over the past year, Afghans began to mock anyone associated with the number 39, which had become a synonym for a pimp. "I'm always getting called a 39er. Even the kids laugh at me," said Muhammad Mobin, 52, a taxi driver, who spray-painted over the 39 on his licence plate to avoid jibes. "I try to stay calm. There's nothing else I can do. I can't sell my car because no none will buy it now." In early 2011, the Afghan traffic department was thrown into chaos when it was unable to sell licence plates bearing 39. Mobile phone Sim card dealers faced similar problems.

No one is sure why the number became associated with the sex trade or where the link originated. Some said a notorious pimp in the western city of Herat used to drive a flashy car with 39 on its licence plate and was known as "39" before a local warlord killed him. Others believed criminals stoked the superstition so that they could buy cars that bore the number at a low price, change the plates and then sell the vehicles at a profit. Whatever its origins, the Afghan government was accused of intensifying the stigma. At a November meeting of tribal elders convened by President Karzai to discuss the country's relationship with America, delegates refused to be part of committee 39. One delegate said: "If I'd sat on that committee, people would have called me a pimp when I went back. Is that what you want?"

Some believed the government should have forced elders to keep the committee. "All the government did was legitimise this absurd belief," said Muhammad Amin, head of education in Bamiyan province where he organised a protest march on 23 November. "We wanted to show that this is not a bad number. This is a number close to our hearts."

Afghan employees of the United Nations were spotted in Jalalabad sporting badges reading "39: I am NOT a fool" and "I love 39". Despite mounting anger among businessmen affected by the accursed number, some predicted things would get worse. "People will stop wearing size 39 shoes," said Muhammad Daoud, who owns a car dealership in Kabul. "Soon we'll have people walking around in shoes that are too big for them." When asked his age, Daoud sheepishly replied "39". His friends burst out laughing. *Sunday Times, 27 Nov 2011.*

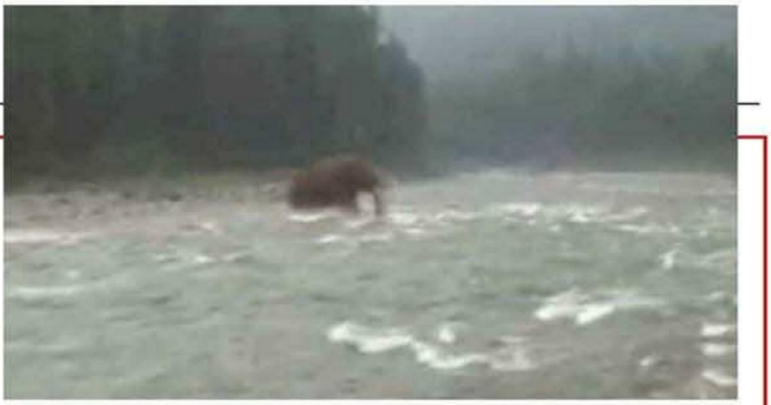
THE FAIRIES' REVENGE

Before his huge gamble on Anglo Irish Bank shares toppled him into bankruptcy, Sean Quinn was Ireland's richest man, with a fortune of £4bn. However, many people in his heartland on the Cavan/Fermanagh border believe his downfall has more to do with the wrath of the fairies than risky business moves. They say it was the decision to move a megalithic burial tomb that led to the fall of his cement, hotels, and insurance empire. The Aughrim Wedge Tomb stood for 4,000 years in the townland after which it is named, two miles (3.2km) outside Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan, but when it got in the way of the expansion of a massive quarry for Quinn Concrete in 1992, permission was granted by the Office of Public Works to move it. Following a full excavation of the site, it was moved stone by stone and relocated in the grounds of Quinn's Slieve Russell Hotel on the other side of the village. According to bankruptcy documents, Quinn now claims to have just £9,000 in the bank.

"I'm a big supporter of Sean Quinn because of what he has done for this area but that tomb should never have been moved," said publican Toirbhealach Lyons, the owner of Molly Maguire's pub in Ballyconnell. "There would be a lot of people who would think you could never have any luck after moving an ancient tombstone." *Irish Independent, 22 Nov 2011.*

SPRING-HEELED JACK RETURNS!

On Valentine's night, 14 February, Scott Martin and his family were travelling home to Banstead in Surrey by taxi from Stoneleigh. Mr Martin, 40, the manager of a building company, described what happened at about 10.30pm: "We were driving



BARCROFT MEDIA

down the Ewell bypass, approaching Nescot College, and saw a man on the other side of the road. We didn't pay much attention until he started crossing over to our side of the road. The next thing he jumped over the centre fencing in the road and ran across our two lanes. On the side of our road is a bank easily 15ft [4.6m] in height and this figure crossed our road, climbed this bank and was gone from sight all in about two seconds. All four of us were baffled and voiced our sighting straight away with the same detail. A dark figure with no real features, but fast in movement with an ease of hurdling obstacles I've never seen. My last image was of him going through the bushes at the top of the bank.

"I'm not usually one to be freaked by these sightings but the cab driver was petrified. He didn't want to drive back alone. I am honestly baffled by this sighting and we are intrigued by it because it was so real but so strange… I have never seen anyone move that quickly across the road and not been startled by the fact that we were driving toward him. If it was a burglar it is the fastest I had ever seen anyone run. That's the only other explanation. But it was just too quick."

His wife Sacha, 37, an accountant, added: "It was more that someone was trying to cross the road of a dual carriageway that was weird." The couple's four-year-old son, Sonny, was too scared to sleep on his own that night.

The family has since likened the figure to Spring-heeled Jack – a mysterious dark figure blamed for a string of attacks in the 19th century, evading his pursuers with his preternatural leaps, first sighted in 1837 [see Mike Dash's definitive study in *Fortean Studies* #3, 1996, pp7–125.] *Surrey Comet, 23 Feb 2012.*

MAMMOTH DECEPTION

The blurry still shown above, taken from video footage, is alleged to show a woolly mammoth lurching through icy waters in Siberia, even though the creatures are thought to have died out at least 10,000 years ago. The footage, supposedly shot by a "government-employed engineer", quickly garnered millions of views on YouTube and the story spread to news outlets and TV stations all over the world, including CBS News, MSNBC, ABCNews and many papers in Britain. The report in *Metro* (10 Feb 2012) said the animal "seems to have red-coloured hair – the same hue as the fur on other dead mammoths recovered from perma-frost in the frozen region." The video was supplied by Australian "paranormal writer" Michael Cohen, who runs "inter-galactic daily news service" allnewsweb.com, and brought us the "dead alien" resembling a mouldy aubergine last November [**FT284:7**]. The footage bears his name and that of a media distribution service, Barcroft Media. Some viewers thought it shows an elephant or a bear with a fish in its mouth.

Two YouTube users, HOAXKiller1 and ModerateMartian, eventually found the original footage, *sans* mammoth. It was shot by Australian documentary filmmaker Lou Petho in the Sayan Mountains in Siberia in 2011. He filmed the video for a documentary he is making re-tracing his grandfather's escape from a Siberian prisoner of war camp in 1915 by walking across Siberia to Budapest. Petho said he contacted Barcroft Media who were "appalled" to hear the footage was fake, offering a "financial arrangement" to settle the matter. Material Cohen has published on his website and YouTube channel has been used to generate countless stories about UFOs, aliens and other strange phenomena. Whether he inserted the "mammoth" into Petho's footage with CGI or was himself taken for a ride is unknown. Previously, Cohen ran the website oneworldpsychics.com and claimed to have psychic abilities. *Sydney Morning Herald, 16 Feb 2012.*

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

GOVERNMENTS' USE OF MICROWAVE BOMBARDMENT

Looking at the number of South American political leaders who were suffering from cancer, President Chavez of Venezuela (below) last year wondered if US agents had some means of giving them the disease. While the Western media guffawed at Chavez's latest ridiculous conspiracy theory, two groups of people didn't join in the general hilarity. One was anyone who remembered the history of the CIA trying to kill foreign leaders.[1] The other was anyone familiar with the development of microwave weaponry since the 1960s.

After the Soviets began irradiating the US embassy in Moscow with microwave radiation in 1960 – eventually leading to the death of the ambassador and reports of wives of US embassy personnel giving birth to deformed babies[2] – the US military began researching microwaves in Project Pandora.[3] This has led to the 'microwave rifle', the 'microwave cannon', 'the rail gun', and the 'active denial system', all of which can be Googled; presumably, there are other projects which can't.

Since exposure to certain microwaves may induce cancer (it is sensible to get your microwave oven regularly checked for leaks), it's not an enormous step to wondering if this research has led to devices for targeting individuals with cancer-inducing microwaves.

The other leader who evoked Western conspiracies was Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who in January blamed a foreign conspiracy for trying to destabilise Syria, saying the "external conspiracy is clear to everybody". Al-Assad's comment did not produce the hilarity which greeted Chavez's, because there is indeed an "external conspiracy" to bring down his regime involving the US, France, Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and described by Alistair Crooke in the *Asia Times*.[4] The sources Crooke quotes are all public, and this is only 'news' because the Anglo-American media have declined to report it thus far. Crooke quotes Michael Scheuer, the former head of the CIA's Bin Laden Unit, warning that forcing Western-style regimes onto the Middle East risks being seen as a "war on Islam" – with known consequences for the West.

Who is Alistair Crooke? He describes himself, at the end of his article, as a former adviser to the former EU Foreign Policy chief, Javier Solana. But he was also a senior British intelligence officer who spent years in the Middle East trying to build bridges between the Israelis and the Palestinians.[5]

Crooke's essay illustrates the complexity of foreign policy formation. For there is no single American or British body which 'makes foreign policy': there are conflicting aims and bureaucracies. For example, while it was official UK foreign policy to accept the existence of hidden 'weapons of mass destruction' as a legitimate reason for the invasion of Iraq, one of the UK's intelligence agencies, the Defence Intelligence Staff, did not concur and was removed from Whitehall's intelligence distribution list.[6] Ex-SIS officer Crooke's article, and the comments of former CIA officer Scheuer, suggest that there is opposition in Whitehall and Washington to the current (unstated) US policy of overthrowing the government of Syria.

Conspiracy theories mostly fail because they simplify complex processes. As Crooke's essay shows, much of the time so does the official narrative conveyed by the major media.

GETTY IMAGES / FRANÇOIS DURAND

NOTES

[1] Initially revealed in the 1975 report of the Church Committee. See http://bit.ly/A0iPnB (history-matters.com).

[2] Richard J Aldrich: *GCHQ*, HarperPress, 2010, p281.

[3] The embassy story was discussed in *Time* in 1976. See http://ti.me/10lRHE (time.com). For an introduction to Pandora see http://bit.ly/ypS2CV (tumblr.com).

[4] "The 'great game' in Syria", at http://bit.ly/rjk4Yp (atimes.com).

[5] See http://bit.ly/ArWyLe (guardian.co.uk).

[6] http://bit.ly/k5lNOH (guardian.co.uk).

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING reports on some dinosaur bones showing up in expected places, a major discovery of artefacts from Bronze Age Cambridgeshire, plus signs that early hominids had discovered the culinary arts.

BONE DISCOVERIES

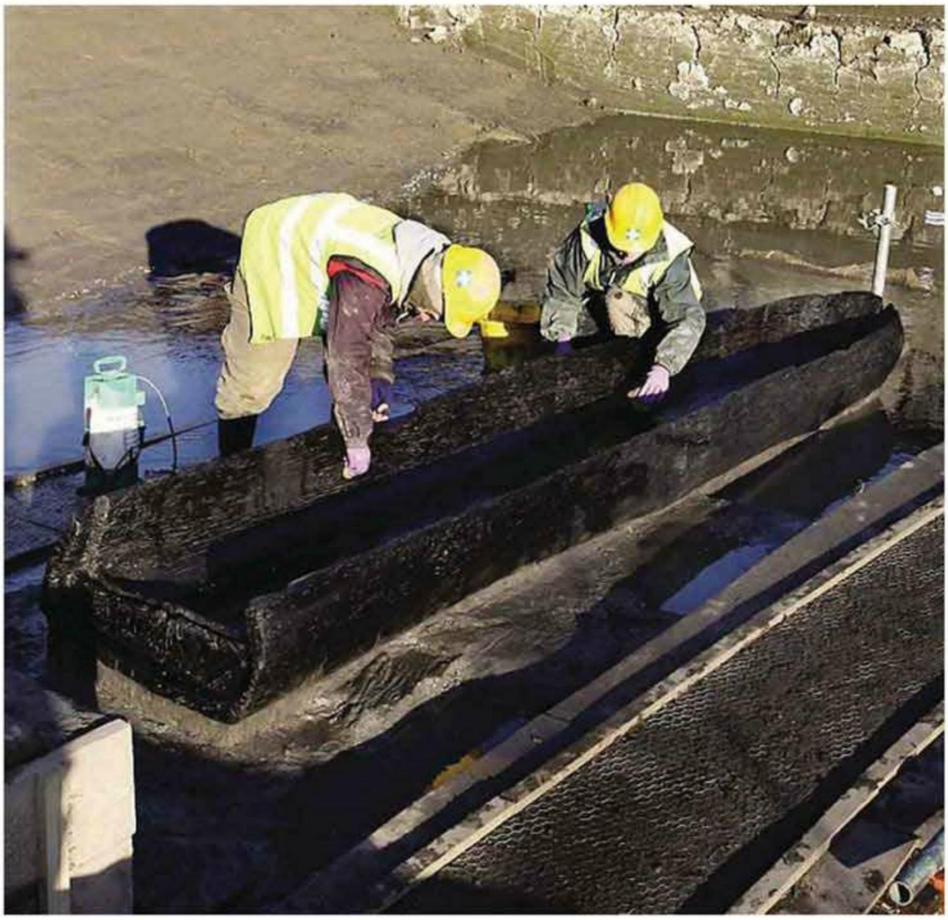
Experts are puzzled as to how a dinosaur bone thought to belong to a 30ft (9m)-long iguanodon ended up in a pensioner's back garden. The man found the football-sized vertebra while digging among tree roots. The rocks around Sunderland are from the Permian era, 250 million years ago, but iguanodons only walked the Earth 130 to 115 million years ago. Dr Angela Milner of the Natural History Museum in London, said: "The bone is the solid part (the centrum) of vertebra from the tail of an iguanodon-like dinosaur. It is not complete enough to identify it more precisely. The rocks around Sunderland are much too old to contain dinosaur bones, so there are only two explanations as to how it got there – either by glacial transport or a one-time souvenir from the south coast of England where iguanodon bones are not infrequently found by fossil hunters." The bone is now on display at Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens. *BBC News, Irish Times, 13 Dec; D.Telegraph, 14 Dec 2011*.

NORTH NEWS & PICTURES

ABOVE: Manager of Sunderland Museums Jo Cunningham and keeper of biology for Tyne and Wear Museums Dan Gordon who examined the iguanadon-like vertebra found in a pensioner's back garden.

A new species of horned dinosaur has been discovered in the vaults of the Natural History Museum. The remains of *Spinops sternbergorum*, from the same family as the Triceratops, were excavated from a quarry alongside other fossils in a so-called "bone bed" in Alberta in 1916. At the time, the bones were described as "rubbish" and lay unnoticed for almost a century before experts realised they belonged to an undescribed species. *D.Telegraph, 7 Dec 2011*.

PA WIRE / CHRIS RADBURN



LEFT: One of the oak boats dating from 3,000 years ago in the Fenlands.

BRONZE AGE ROW-BOATS

Six boats hollowed out of oak tree trunks are among hundreds of intact 3,000-year-old artefacts unearthed in the Cambridgeshire fens at Whittlesey, near Peterborough, the largest Bronze Age collection ever found in one place in Britain. Their excellent condition is due to their preservation in the silt and peat along the course of the former River Nene. The site is being excavated before a brick quarry is extended. "Usually at a Later Bronze Age period site you get pits, postholes and maybe one or two exciting metal finds," said David Gibson, head of Cambridge University's archæological unit, "but this time so much more has been preserved. We can actually see everyday life during the Bronze Age in the round."

The boats, two of which bear unusual decoration, range from about 6ft (1.8m) long to a little more than 27ft (8.3m). They are in such good condition that the wood grain and colour can be seen clearly, as can signs of repairs. There are weirs and fish traps in the form of big woven willow baskets, fragments of garments with ornamental hems made from fibrous bark, ropes, buckets, and jewellery, including green and blue beads. Extensive finds of metalwork include bronze swords and spears with handles intact, some apparently tossed into the river in perfect condition, possibly as votive offerings. Although these boats were unlikely to have been used at sea, one of the swords is of a type normally found in northern Spain. There are even containers of food, including a bowl with a wooden spoon still wedged into the contents, which turned out to be nettle stew. So far, no bodies have been found, but barely a fraction of the site has been excavated. *Observer, 4 Dec; D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 10 Dec 2011.*

BIRTH OF COOKING

Early humans cooked up their first hot meals more than 1.9 million years ago, much earlier than was previously believed and long before our ancient ancestors left Africa to colonise the world, according to researchers at Harvard University. The advent of cooking was a crucial stage in human evolution, allowing humans to broaden their diet and extract more calories from their food. The researchers correlated data on how long various species spend feeding: chimps, our closest living relatives, typically spend more than a third of their day feeding, while humans spend about five per cent of their time eating. The study (in the US journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*) showed that three species of humans – *Homo erectus*, *H.neanderthalenis* and *H.sapiens* – evolved small molars relatively quickly, which could not be explained by general changes in head and jaw sizes.

It is thought that as early humans learned how to cook, they no longer needed large back teeth to chew tough food, or had to spend hours chewing to gain enough calories. The scientists claim that *H.erectus*, which emerged around 1.9 million years ago, spent 6.1 per cent of its time eating, while Neanderthals spent seven per cent. "We think that *Homo erectus* and Neanderthals were spending about as much of their day feeding as we do, which implies that they were both cooking," said Chris Organ, an evolutionary biologist at Harvard. *Guardian, 23 Aug 2011.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

149: MORE BYZANTINE BIZARRERIES

For modern Turkish delights, see Fort, *Books*, pp54 & 555 (sky-falls of vegetable and other edible matter, equated by him with Biblical 'manna'); pp758–9, 790, 811 (earthquakes and deluges in quick succession); p911 (a mysterious 'locked-room' fire in Constantinople's War Office archives) – NB: other Index references are false.

The *Paschal Chronicle* (World History from Adam to AD 628) abounds in miraculous visions and weird weather, plus this diverting extra (combining our Man Walks Into A Pub and An Englishman, A Scotsman…). Three pious brothers were travelling with a Jew. They found a dead serpent on the road. The "scornful" Jew gibed, "If you eat it and don't die, I'll become a Christian" – no prizes for guessing the outcome.

Theophanes's similar *Chronicle* has the same mixture, including an island created by mysterious maritime eruptions and what was done to a Bulgarian heretic: "His hands and feet were cut off, then a physician vivisected him from pubis to sternum for an anatomy lesson, after which he was burnt alive" – no such NHS horror stories, I trust.

Another strange island tale in the anonymous *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Brief Historical Notes) has one bewitched by the empress Verina, causing many unexplained deaths and subsequent abandonment until Justinian II (a reverse Canute) ordered the sea to flood over and sink it.

This book's preoccupation is weird tales about Constantinopolitan statues, frequently involving elephants. Repairs to one jumbo-sized edifice, toppled by an earthquake, disclosed a complete set of human bones inside, complete with verse-inscribed tablet. Another colossus commemorated a loyal pachyderm that killed the neighbouring dishonest silversmith who had murdered his master and offered the body as food.

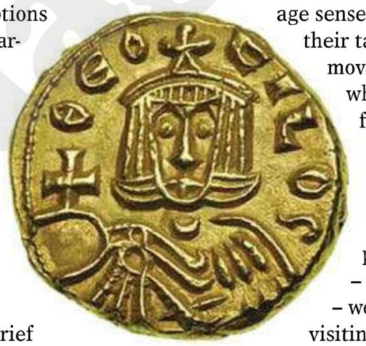
Theophanes and other chroniclers describe how the iconoclast emperor Theophilus (829–42) had 12 insulting Greek verses branded or tattooed across the faces of two obdurately iconodule monks. As JB Bury (*History of the Eastern Roman Empire*, Macmillan, 1912, p136) remarks in words worthy of Gibbon: "Some admiration is due to the dexterity and delicacy of touch of the tormentor who succeeded in branding twelve iambic lines on a human face." – Tattoo You! No Use In Crying, as the Stones noted in song.

Although largely a series of one-offs, never percolating into the mainstream, Byzantine technology is frequently spectacular. Take the Sweeney Todd-like contrivance reported by Socrates (*Ecclesiastical History*, bk5 ch18) whereby to get cheap labour for the nearby underground bakeries, taverns stocked with whores were built each side, whence the lustful-thirsty patrons "were precipitated from tavern to bakery by a certain mechanical device". In recessionary times, employers would be more likely to prefer the reverse direction. Still, with bakeries replaced by police stations this would be a handy device for High Street pubs on Friday night.

Leo the Philosopher (a title anciently connoting scientist) designed for the aforementioned Theophilus a golden tree on which birds fluttered and tweeted (pre-computer age sense), golden lions that shook their tails and roared, and a fast-moving elevator throne that whisked the emperor from floor to ceiling – one hopes he included a motion-sickness bag. According to Constantine Porphyrogentius (*On the Ceremonies*, paras567–70), these toys – they fascinated WB Yeats – were switched on to impress visiting firemen, especially foreign diplomats – rather like the conceit elaborated in Tati's *Mon Oncle*. One such, Liutprand of Cremona (*Antapodosis*, bk6 ch6 – title means Tit for Tat) had taken steps to ascertain what to expect, and came determined not to be impressed – or at least not to show it.

Despite Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away", Byzantine curiosities may here do so. According to folklore (Greek-English text, CA Trypanis, *The Penguin Book of Greek Verse*, 1971, 469–70) when Constantinople fell to Mehmet II's cannon-guns on Tuesday, 29 May 1453, the priests celebrating the Last Mass in Hagia Sophia melted into the walls where, whitewashed over, they wait to emerge when their cathedral becomes re-Christianised.

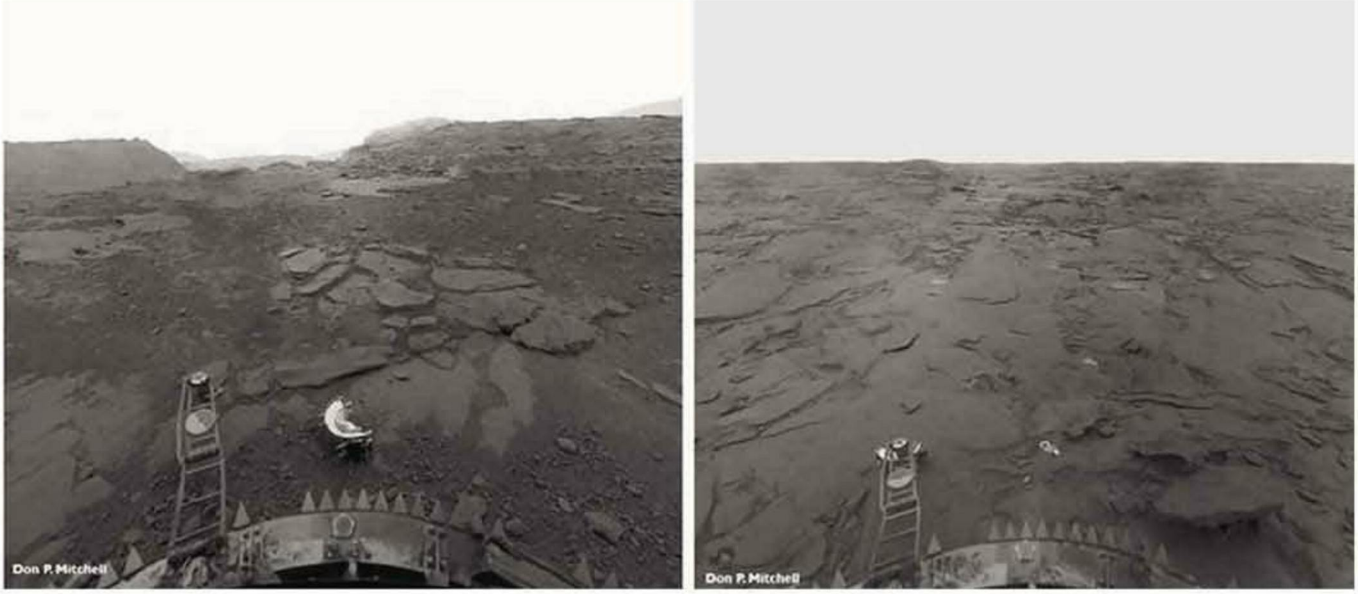
Waiting also, somewhere, may be the ghosts of 1970s English postman Archie White-Palæologus and Peter Francis Mills (Newport, Isle of Wight, died 1988), both of whom laid dynastic claim to the Byzantine throne (Donald M Nichol, *The Immortal Emperor* (Cambridge UP, 1992, 115–22).



ABOVE: Gold solidus from the reign of Byzantine Emperor Theophilus, AD 829–842.

Life on Venus?

Russian scientist claims that a scorpion-like creature can be seen in photos taken by landing craft on our sister planet.



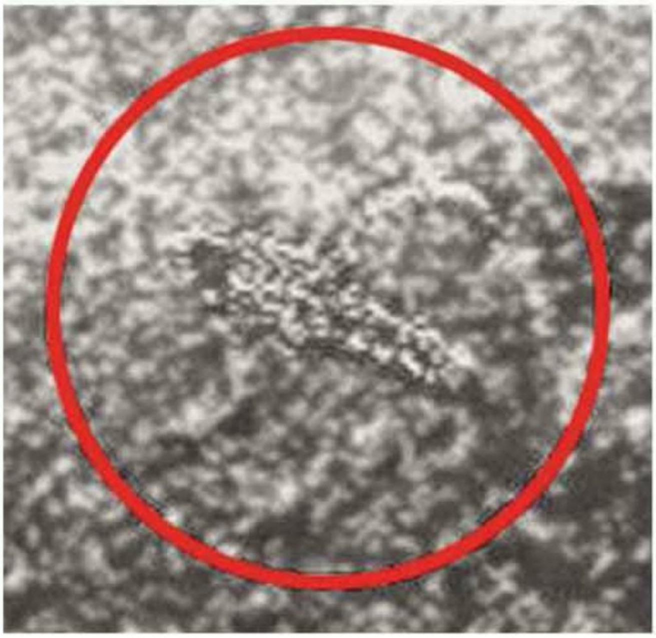
WWW.MENTALLANDSCAPE.COM / DON P MITCHELL

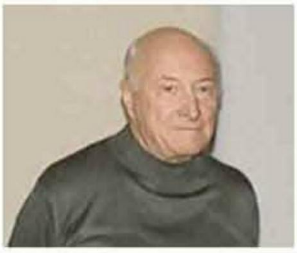
ABOVE: Two of the reprocessed photos taken from the Soviet Union's Venus probes showing the 'moving' lens cap. **BELOW:** Leonid Ksanfomaliti. **BOTTOM:** This grainy, low-resolution image was said to show a scorpion-like creature, but NASA imaging experts dismiss it as just data "noise" which is not to be found in high-resolution versions of the picture.

According to the Russian news service Ria Novosti, Leonid Ksanfomaliti, 79, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences who worked on unmanned Soviet missions to Venus during the 1970s and '80s, has found signs of life on Venus. He has written an article in the journal *Solar System Research* calling attention to several objects photographed by the Venus-13 landing probe, a Soviet spacecraft that landed on Venus in 1982. The objects – including features described as a disc and a scorpion – appear to change locations from one photo to the next. "What if we forget about the current theories about the non-existence of life on Venus?" Ksanfomaliti is quoted as asking. "Let's boldly suggest that the objects' morphological features would allow us to say that they are living."

Whether he really has suggested that the old photographs contain living creatures that were somehow overlooked previously, or whether his words have been mistranslated, misconstrued or should have been quietly ignored, the claim has made headlines around the globe. No records have previously been found of life on Venus, which has a surface temperature as high as 460°C (860°F) and an atmosphere that is 96.5 per cent carbon dioxide laced with clouds of sulphur dioxide.

What if we forget theories on the non-existence of life on Venus?





In one image, the Venus-13 landing probe is seen parked on the rocky Venusian foreground, and a crab-shaped object stands inches from the probe. In another image, this object appears to be in a different location. According to Jonathon Hill, a research technician at the Mars Space Flight Facility at Arizona State University, who processes many of the images taken during NASA's Mars missions, higher-resolution versions of the Venus-13 images show that the crab-like object is actually a mechanical component, not a living creature. The same object shows up in a photograph taken by an identical landing probe, Venus-14, which also landed on the planet.

Mr Hill said: "If those objects were already on the surface of

Venus, what are the chances that Venus-13 and 14, which landed nearly 1,000 kilometres [620 miles] apart, would both land inches away from the only ones in sight and they would be in the same positions relative to the spacecraft? It makes much more sense that it's a piece of the lander designed to break off during the deployment of one of the scientific instruments."

According to NASA, the semicircular components are camera lens covers that popped off the Venus probes after they landed. As for why they appear to be in different places in the two Venus-13 photos, "Venus-13 had two cameras, one in front and one in back. The one image shows the front camera lens cap and the other shows the rear camera lens cap, not one lens cap that moved," said Ted Stryk, a photo editor who reprocesses and enhances many NASA and Soviet space programme images.

In fact, the semicircular objects are famous for being lens caps, because the one that popped off Venus-14's camera landed exactly where a spring-loaded arm was meant to touch the Venusian surface in order to measure its compressibility. The lander ended up measuring properties of the cap. The other photograph highlighted by Ksanfomaliti, which supposedly shows a scorpion-like creature, contains a blur. "The features that Ksanfomaliti shows are nothing more than processed noise, at best, in some particularly bad versions of the images. They are not in the original data," Stryk said. Or, as Hill put it, the image is an example of "letting your mind see patterns in low-resolution data that simply aren't real."

Scientists have not ruled out the possibility of life having once existed on Venus, but most research has focused on whether there were oceans, and possibly life, in the distant past, before the greenhouse effect created the scorching temperatures that exist on the surface today. *dailymail.co.uk, 23 Jan; SPACE.com, telegraph.co.uk, 24 Jan 2012.*

ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

© PIXEL MEMOIRS – FOTOLIA.COM

ALONG CAME A (MEGA-)SPIDER...

On 8 January 2012, as part of its *Man V Monster* television series investigating various mystery beasts around the world, National Geographic Channel rescreened an entertaining episode in which British cinematographer Richard Terry journeyed to the rainforests of Colombia in search of a hitherto little-publicised yet unquestionably dramatic cryptid: a gigantic form of tarantula-like spider. The indigenous people sharing its jungle habitat claim it measures more than 1m (39in) across, kills creatures as big as horses, and even abducts small children from their villages. Back in 2008, another TV series, *MonsterQuest*, had dispatched eminent tarantula expert Rick C West to an area of rainforest just inside Venezuela's border with Colombia to seek out a comparable mega-arachnid reported there.

In both locations, villagers stated that the giant spiders lived in underground lairs that opened onto the forest floor via huge holes, but although some extremely large spider lairs and entry/exit holes were indeed discovered, no outsized inhabitants were unearthed by either of the two expeditions. Physiologically, it ought to be impossible for spiders to attain sizes compatible with the feats attributed to them, but extra-large spiders have also been reported from other locations, including the Congo and Papua New Guinea.

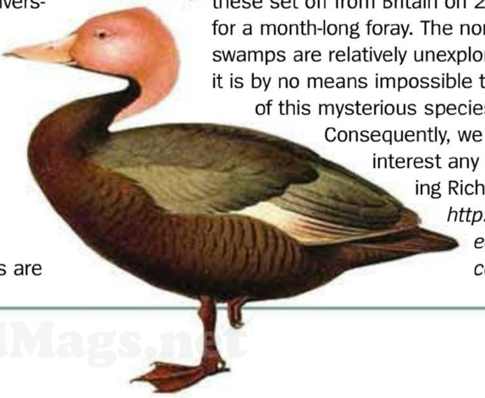
So could there truly be some veritable eight-legged monsters lurking just beyond the gaze of current scientific scrutiny? Rick West plans to continue searching for evidence of their reality, which may be good news for cryptozoology – but is very bad news for arachnophobes! *http://bit.ly/pOLUUZ (natgeotv.com).*

SHARKS MIX 'N' MATCH

In late December 2011, a team of Australian scientists led by Queensland University zoologist Dr Jess Morgan revealed the existence of the world's very first recorded shark hybrids, present in seas off Queensland, Australia. Their research showed that this unexpected interbreeding between two different shark species has been occurring here for several generations, and that the hybrids are therefore clearly viable (many animal hybrids are sterile or display reduced viability). In fact, they are remarkably abundant. The two progenitor species are the common black-tip shark *Carcharhinus limbatus* (of widespread distribution in tropical and cooler seas globally) and the Australian black-tip shark *C.tilstoni* (a local species confined to tropical waters). The existence and apparent long-term occurrence of such hybridisation is interesting biologically, but it's particularly significant that the hybrids occur in cooler, more temperate waters than *C.tilstoni*. This means that genes derived from *C.tilstoni* are now expanding their distribution beyond the tropical zone into cooler seas previously off-limits to this species – thereby indicating that the Australian black-tip shark is adapting to climate change by increasing its range via hybridisation. *Yahoo News UK, 3 Jan 2012*.

THINK PINK!

Although it officially became extinct in the wild during the 1930s and in captivity a decade later, there have been a number of unconfirmed sightings since then of the pink-headed duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* – one of Asia's most distinctive but enigmatic species of waterfowl (below). The most recent of these occurred in the Bhamo wetlands of Kachin State, northern Myanmar (formerly Burma), during December 2010. There have also been a number of expeditions seeking this lost duck, but so far to no avail. On 14 February 2009, British explorer Richard Thorns had a putative sighting in Bhamo, and he even succeeded in photographing the bird in question. Following considerable scrutiny, however, it was eventually identified not as *Rhodonessa* but as a spot-billed duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* instead. Disappointed but undaunted, Richard has since launched further Myanmar-based expeditions, and the latest of these set off from Britain on 29 December 2011 for a month-long foray. The northern Burmese swamps are relatively unexplored and remote, so it is by no means impossible that small numbers of this mysterious species still survive here. Consequently, we now await with great interest any updates concerning Richard's new quest. *http://bit.ly/yOz5c6* (*forteanzoology.blogspot.com*), *29 Dec 2011*.



NECROLOG

We note the passing of a noted photographer of haunted settings, and a veteran supplier of reading matter for the discerning fortean.

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SIMON MARSDEN

Marsden was a photographer specialising in spooky subjects such as ruins, moonlit abbeys and graveyards, made all the more atmospheric by his signature use of infra-red film. "It is not my intention to try to convince that ghosts exist," he said, "but rather to inspire you not to take everything around you at face value. I believe that another dimension, a spirit world, runs parallel to our own, and that sometimes, when the conditions are right, we can see into and become part of this supernatural domain. The mystical quality of my photographs reflects this ancient order and they attempt to reveal what is eternal."

The younger son of Sir John Denton Marsden, 2nd Baronet, Simon was brought up in the Lincolnshire Wolds, at Panton Hall and Thorpe Hall, both of which were reputed to be haunted. He was "ever vigilant" for the appearance of Thorpe's famous "Green Lady", who had committed suicide beneath an oak tree in the park in the 17th century and was said to appear sitting in a tree with seven branches.

In 1969, he went to work in London as an assistant to the Irish photographer Ruan O'Lochlainn, whose wife, Jackie Mackay, taught him the skills of the darkroom. After touring the US and spending two years in New York, he returned to Britain in 1974 and began to concentrate on the allegedly haunted sites that became his speciality. On one occasion, while working at the Rollright Stones, the Neolithic and Bronze Age site at Long Compton, Warwickshire, he suddenly felt a "force" that catapulted the camera out of his hands. He later realised he had bruises all down one arm.

Marsden's work was exhibited widely in Britain and aboard, and he published a number of books, including *The Haunted Realm* (1986), *Phantoms of the Isles* (1990), *The Journal of a Ghosthunter: in search of the undead from Ireland to Transylvania* (1994), *Venice, City of Haunting Dreams* (2001), *Ghosthunter: a journey through haunted France* (2006) *Memento Mori: churches and graveyards of England* (2007) and *Vampires: the twilight world* (2011). In 2002, his visits to spooky locations in Ireland were the subject of a documentary/drama film, *The Twilight Hour*, directed by Jason Figgis. "The most chilling sequence was the deeply disturbing and creepily atmospheric ruined Palladian mansion of Woodlawn House in Co. Galway," Figgis recalled. "It was here that we heard the weeping of a woman in some distress. Upon immediate investigation, we could find no evidence of anyone in the sprawling mansion."

Marsden succeeded to the baronetcy in 1997 on the death of his elder brother Nigel. His marriage to Catherine Windsor-Lewis was dissolved in 1978, and in 1984 he married Cassie Stanton, by whom he had a son and daughter. He is succeeded in the baronetcy by his son Tadgh, born in 1990.

Sir Simon Neville Llewelyn Marsden, Bt, photographer, born 1 Dec 1948; died 22 Jan 2012, aged 63.

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BOB GIRARD

In the days before the Internet, Bob Girard's Arcturus Book Service was one of the key suppliers – by mail order – of literature on the paranormal, ufology, cryptozoology and fortean subjects. It was, he once claimed, not just a way to make a living, but also "a way to connect to people, strange and wonderful people that I would never had been able to find without my book list".

Girard was raised and educated in Scotia, New York. After graduating from Ithaca College with a degree in English in 1964, he enlisted in the United States Air Force, serving in Texas and Turkey before being honourably discharged with the rank of sergeant in 1968. He married Cecelia Torres in 1971, and, after seven years as a logistics manager for a tyre company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, relocated to Ibarra, Ecuador, where he taught English as a second language. In 1980, the family returned to the United States and settled in Scotia, where Girard founded his mail-order book business. In 1985, he divorced and, two years later, married his second wife, Monica A Williams, moving his family and business to Stone Mountain, Georgia. Their final move was to Port St Lucie, Florida.

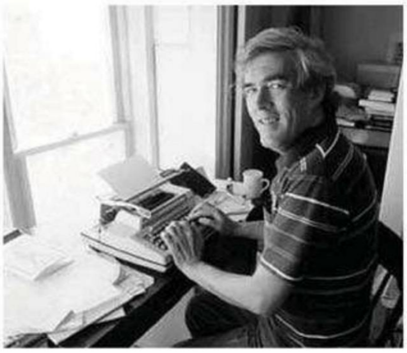
Girard's main interests were UFOs and history; he was well read in both but also kept up a working knowledge of cryptozoology, the Hollow Earth, psychical research, ancient astronauts, and forteana. He once told Clas Svahn: "My dream was to have one business in which the entire world's literature on these subjects was all under one roof." He steadily expanded his business with new and used books, out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, self-published books and periodicals, recorded material and related ephemera that his worldwide clientele could not get anywhere else.

The Arcturus catalogue was often published on an erratic schedule and came out "when it was ready". Girard's clients particularly valued it because his listings were often qualified with opinionated evaluations, sometimes caustically rude – especially when he felt the publication damaged the hard-won integrity of ufological scholarship. In his online tribute, Loren Coleman cited Girard's condemnation of Billy Meier's notorious *Talmud of Jmmanuel* [*sic*] (allegedly written by Judas Iscariot and discovered by Meier in 1963) as "an embarrassment, in which Billy Meier's recording of a mysterious Aramaic scripture – complete with Christ as a Pleiadian – is fanatically forced to fit a former fundamentalist's deep need to reconcile UFOs and Christ". Loren added that he had known Girard for more than 30 years: "I helped him get his mailing list together, I ordered books from him routinely, and he'd sell books of mine direct from the publishers. He wasn't always kind about what he saw in my books, but I liked him for his honest critiques."

This respect was widely felt and it is significant that Girard's customers remained largely loyal despite his tendency to harangue them in his mailings for not buying enough or more often. As Clas Svahn noted in his tribute blog: "Bob Girard loved books. He really wanted us to read them. But as Amazon and other Internet-based book shops came around he lost many of his costumers." Girard resented this strongly. As his mail-order service began to struggle, he "threatened to close it down, sent angry emails to reluctant costumers, but in the end he still gave us the best and most valuable service that any bookseller could give", said Svahn. Girard could also be generous to a fault, helping new authors with their research and small, self-publishers by plugging their works in his catalogues. If you were a good customer and he knew your taste, he would often track down rare books for you.

Robert C Girard, bookseller and critic, born Schenectady, NY, 9 July 1942; died from prostate cancer at Fort Pierce, Florida 12 Aug 2011, aged 69.

Bob Rickard

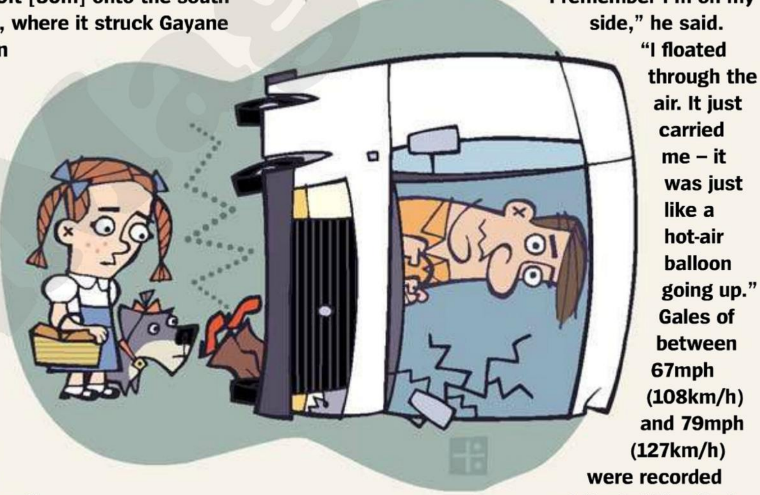


FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/strangedeaths

Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

"THIS IS A TRAGICALLY BIZARRE CASE," ruled the State Appeals Court in Chicago, "and case law involving flying bodies is sparse. Nevertheless, the facts are clear. In 2008, 18-year-old Hiroyuki Joho was hurrying in pouring rain across the tracks, with an umbrella over his head, to catch an inbound train at Edgebrook Metra station in Chicago, when he was struck by a southbound Amtrak train travelling at more than 70mph [113km/h]. A large portion of his body was thrown 100ft [30m] onto the southbound platform, where it struck Gayane Zokhrabov, then aged 58, who was waiting to catch the 8.17 to work. She was knocked to the ground by Joho's corpse, her leg and wrist were broken, and she sued Joho's estate for negligence by allowing his body to injure her." After the appeals court ruled in favour of Ms Zokhrabov, her lawyer Leslie Rosen told reporters: "While the circumstances of this case are gory and creepy, it should be treated like a regular negligence case. If you do something as stupid as this guy did, you have to be responsible for what comes from it, even if you're dead." ***Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, dailymail.co.uk, 29 Dec 2011.***


TERRY COLON

ROSEMARY BOWER, 70, OF BROOKVILLE, Pennsylvania, was driving on Route 830 in Washington Township at about 6.45am on 27 December 2011 when a car coming towards her struck a deer that ran into the road. The deer went airborne and hit Bower's windshield. The impact cut the animal in half and sent the head and shoulders into the car, killing Bower. Her car hit another car about 700 yards down the road before stopping in a ditch. The drivers of the other two cars were uninjured. No charges were filed. *[AP] 28 Dec 2011.*

EDWARD SLANEY, 35, OF SOWERBY BRIDGE, West Yorkshire, was crushed to death by a lorry blown off all four wheels in a notoriously windy area near a Leeds skyscraper on 10 March 2011. The driver, Paul Bartle, told Leeds coroner's court that he was driving past the Bridgewater Place building when his lorry was blown onto Mr Slaney and a 22-year-old woman, who were waiting to cross the road. "I was doing about 20mph [32km/h], the next thing I remember I'm on my side," he said. "I floated through the air. It just carried me – it was just like a hot-air balloon going up." Gales of between 67mph (108km/h) and 79mph (127km/h) were recorded at the building that day, it was claimed. Ambulances took Mr Slaney and the woman to hospital. Mr Slaney, an environmental engineer, died of chest injuries. The woman survived but suffered serious internal injuries. ***D.Telegraph, Metro, 10 Feb 2012*****.**

A MASTER-BLENDER AT THE GLENFIDDICH distillery in Dufftown, Banffshire, northern Scotland, drowned in a giant vat of whisky. Brian Ettles, 46, allegedly threw himself into the 16ft (5m) wooden tank filled with water and yeast on the night of 7 January. Firemen and paramedics tried to rescue him from the 11,000-gallon (50,000-litre) container, but he was pronounced dead at the scene. He had worked at the distillery for 23 years. *D.Mail, Sun, 11 Jan 2012.*

MARTIN HUEBER, 42, WAS KILLED WHEN A steel box full of offal exploded at a recycling plant in Vienna, Austria. ***Sun, 15 Feb 2011.***

the UFO files

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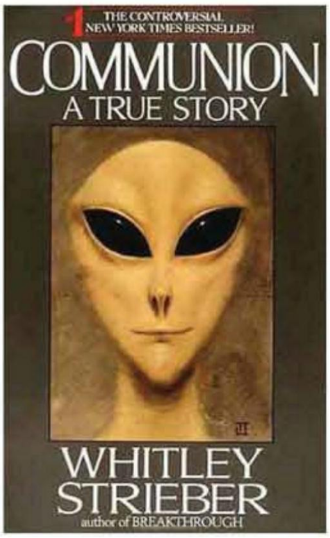
FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

WHOLLY COMMUNION?

When, in 1987, sci-fi and fantasy author Whitley Strieber published *Communion*, the cover, consisting of the striking image of the classic teardrop-shaped, dark eyed 'alien' face was suddenly everywhere. Where once only a relatively small number of people knew what an 'alien' looked like, within a matter of months millions were aware, seeing the face on billboards, in magazines and on TV. And, inevitably, 'abduction' experiences increased, both in number and strangeness. Was this because Strieber's confessions had somehow 'allowed' others to come forward to disclose the weird experiences that had plagued them for years? Or was it just a testament to the power of the media coupled with people's desire to believe, (as has also been evidenced in the UK with the 'ghost craze' over the past 10 years or so). Now Strieber has written *Solving the Communion Enigma: What Is To Come*. The book attempts to explain the paranormal events in his life since the publication of the original *Communion* trilogy. Many people think Strieber's experiences ended with his UFO 'abduction', but they continue to the present day and are, broadly speaking, more paranormal than UFO-based. Ever since he 'came out', his UFO encounters have been ridiculed and he has been criticised as being fantasy-prone, or an outright liar, by elements from both sides of the UFO community. But his subsequent books detailing further experiences struck a chord with many readers and, as with *Communion*, he has received postbags full of mail from others who claimed similar experiences, once again raising the question of which came first, the alien or the imagination. http://bit.ly/yqbqhQ (huffingtonpost.com); www.unknowncountry.com/



OLYMPIC UFOS

One of the more barmy 2012 predictions is for a fake alien invasion at the opening ceremony of the London Olympics. Perhaps the New World Order's plans are already underway. On the night of 21 January, residents in north Kent were startled by the sight and sound of low-level fighter jets streaking across the sky in pursuit of what appeared to be a UFO. A young couple from Gravesend said they saw "a reddy-orange object (which was very low in the sky) and was an oval shape but quite large" moving in "a tight abrupt circle before shooting off in such a fast fashion that the two jets that appeared were too late to catch up with it". Others heard the boom and whoosh of jets as the aircraft headed towards central London. The flap prompted a FOI request that asked "where the RAF [had] scrambled, investigated, chased or attempted to intercept unknown radar targets or visual sightings over the counties of Kent and Surrey". The Ministry denied UFOs were the target and said the flap was caused by two Typhoons that were practising landing at RAF Northolt, where they will be stationed as part of the military defence of the capital during the Games. They said the jets circled London and carried out "system checks" over the Olympic stadium before returning to their base in Lincolnshire. But 'pixienix', posting on the *Gravesend Messenger* website, was not convinced: "My brother works for the RAF on fighter jets and there is no reason why they would be performing training exercises for the Olympics at that time of night," he wrote. "I'm not saying it was a UFO, but it definitely was not so-called 'training exercises'". *http://bit.ly/x5icO6 (Gravesend Messenger, 23 Jan 2012; http://bit.ly/Ak7MXd (Whatdotheyknow.com).*

'NO EVIDENCE FOR ET' – OBAMA

Despite recent moves by the British and other governments to be more open about their limited interest in UFOs, official statements on this subject continue to be widely disbelieved. For example, a poll conducted in the USA by the Gallup organisation on the 50th anniversary of the Roswell incident found 71 per cent of respondents believed the government is hiding knowledge of UFOs. Given such *apparent* high levels of public belief, it was surprising to learn that a hardcore of just 17,000 people were willing to sign two recent petitions that demanded the US Government 'fess up what it knows about aliens. The first, circulated by exopolitical activist Stephen Bassett's 'Paradigm Research Group', attracted just 12,000 signatures. This called on the Obama administration to "formally acknowledge an extraterrestrial presence engaging the human race". The second, with just 5,000 signatures, called on the President to "immediately disclose the government's knowledge of and communications" with aliens. Responding to both petitions in November, a White House spokesman said there was "no evidence that any life exists outside our planet, or that an extraterrestrial presence has contacted or engaged any member of the human race". He added: "In addition, there is no credible information to suggest that any evidence is being hidden from the public's eye." Long ago, governments realised that honest denials are unlikely to convince those who believe that the powers-that-be are hiding 'the truth' about UFOs. But, on this poor showing, the Exopolitics movement isn't going to force anyone to reveal 'secrets' or shake the foundations of the military-industrial complex just yet. *BBC News Online, 8 Nov 2011; http://bit.ly/tQTxGT (whitehouse.gov).*

TORY UFO 'WITCH HUNT'

A Conservative candidate for the Euro-elections is facing a battle to keep his candidacy after it emerged that he has written books on ghosts, aliens and UFOs and – shock horror! – teaches a course on the paranormal. Last year, Rupert Matthews was in line to step into the shoes of sitting East Midlands MEP and fellow Eurosceptic Roger Helmer. But that was before Tory bigwigs began to 'have doubts' about Matthews's suitability when news of his unconventional writing interests emerged. The row has now gone all the way to the top after a group of MPs asked David Cameron to intervene. As the *Mail*'s Simon Richards commented: "[I]n today's politically correct Conservative Party it appears to be unacceptable to enjoy ghost stories. What next – declare unfit for office anybody who's watched an episode of *Doctor Who*?"

So watch out folks – if you're planning to stand for political office, make sure you hide your back issues of *Fortean Times*! *D.Mail online, 24+25 Jan 2012.*

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES INVESTIGATES SIGHTINGS OF MYSTERY AIRCRAFT OVER NORTH WALES.

FLIGHTS FROM NOWHERE: PART 1

3
AIRBUS BELUGA
3

LEFT: The huge Beluga cargo plane is used to transport Airbus parts to a plant near Chester, but only commenced operational flying in 1995.

In October 2005, on a bus heading through Rhyl, I saw an aircraft. It *was* an aircraft – not a UFO. However, it was odd, flying just beyond the promenade over the beach. It was barely above rooftop level and you could clearly see the cockpit of a large transport or cargo type aircraft, rather old-fashioned in appearance. I concluded that it was possibly a Hercules and assumed that such a major incident would surely make the local news. But there was nothing. Some months later, I saw it again, with a wider vista, from the Blue Bridge crossing the River Clwyd as it enters the sea at Rhyl. This time it was heading away from me and I saw less detail but could appreciate that it was smaller than I had thought.

That was the last time I saw this plane, but a couple of other people reported it to me over the North Wales coast between 2005 and 2009. Nobody had considered it to be a UFO or, indeed, anything anomalous. My own enquiries (though I found no documented evidence) suggested that the aircraft I had seen was some sort of survey flight taking water quality readings and photographs due to the ongoing construction of the wind farms that have sprung up offshore since 2003. However, my attempts to track the source of this puzzling flight led me into stranger waters, where I quickly realised that this part of Wales had real form when it came to unidentified aircraft.

In October 1986, as a scan of my records showed, there were sightings from both Rhyl and Prestatyn of a strange aircraft coming in from the coast low enough to reveal a row of illuminated windows running along its fuselage. The witnesses were sure that this was no ordinary plane because of both its proximity and the silence of its passage.

Local investigator Margaret Fry had also sent me a report back in 1987 that several people in the small market town of Abergele had observed a "wartime transport" aircraft overhead – dark in colour and not unlike a Hercules in outline. Enquiries with RAF Valley at the time had failed no identify the plane.

The aircraft was so low that the pilot was visible

On rediscovering Margaret's report, I smiled, as, by coincidence, we had both, since then, moved to that same small market town. But by the time she moved to Abergele in the 1990s, Margaret had received more sighting reports of the same type of aircraft from villages such as Llangernyw, where mothers picking up children from school one day had witnessed a very similar aerial 'apparition' that just pulled up at the last moment to avoid a crash into the steep valley.

Much later, the local media started asking for more witnesses to come forward, via a BBC blog, but with the emphasis now changed. Instead of these simply being out-of-place aircraft (as I had presumed) or reported in the context of UFOs, as some of those earlier sightings had been, they were being sought as possible time-slips or ghostly encounters with old aircraft that had crashed locally long ago.

Curiously, back in 1978, I had met one witness from the Flint area who had combined all of these concepts into one case. The young girl had a long list of weird experiences that had culminated in seeing a landed UFO with silver-clad entities taking soil samples nearby. On another occasion, she had watched an old aircraft flying low over the coast and then falling towards the sea before it simply disappeared. There had been a crash nearby decades earlier and so the possibility of a time-slip apparition of the event was mooted.

Meanwhile, I found that a witness from the Wirral, called Andreas, had contacted the BBC blog to describe something like a "shiny black B-25 bomber" from World War II flying low and slow over the Dee Estuary. This neatly meshed with the young girl's earlier report from the Welsh side.

A more recent sighting came on 13 October 2009, on a sunny afternoon at Rossett, near Wrexham. The plane first appeared over the village of Dodlestone, just across the English border; I quickly recognised this as the location of a famous poltergeist/time-slip case from the mid 1980s fully documented by Ken Webster in his 1989 book *The Vertical Plane* (see **FT108:40–44**). Among the many oddities documented in the old village cottage was a series of messages detected on a home computer that seemed to suggest communication coming from both the past and future (via a source signing itself 2109). Now, 100 years exactly before that 'date', a woman named Barbara, driving from Dodleston to Rossett, reported a large transport aircraft that appeared out of nowhere and flew across her path "very low indeed". She heard no sound and likened what she saw to the by now familiar Hercules.

Trying to rationalise this sighting, I wondered if it might be a possible misperception of the huge Beluga cargo plane used to fly Airbus parts in and out of the Broughton plant near Chester. It's here that the giant aircraft wings are constructed, and I have several times watched these whale-like planes pass overhead, and their trips can take them near to Rossett.

However, I know that the Beluga – a striking Behemoth – is not what I saw over Rhyl and that mistaking them for a Hercules might be a stretch. The Beluga only started operation in 1995, and so wasn't even airborne when some earlier sightings occurred.

Another case is particularly noteworthy. A man from the West Midlands described an event that took place when he was on holiday as a child in August 1980. He was on the same beach at Rhyl where I saw my plane, hunting for crabs with his sister. Suddenly, a huge aircraft approached from the Abergele direction, so low that the pilot was visible. He grabbed his sister and they threw themselves to the sand as the aircraft passed over, climbed upwards and disappeared without sound.

My own trivial sighting had inspired this unfolding quest for evidence and I was very surprised by the extent of what emerged. And the story was about to get even more remarkable. One new case would link that same Blue Bridge with an 'alien abduction', while another that began like those examined above took off in a much more interesting direction.

These two incidents will feature in part two of this report next month, where they pose fascinating questions about what is really going on...

THAT SINKING FEELING...

This month marks the centenary of the sinking of the *RMS Titanic*, in which 1,522 people – two thirds of those on board – perished after the giant passenger liner hit an iceberg in the Atlantic on her maiden voyage. **CAROL FENLON** examines the numerous portents and premonitions that accompanied – and perhaps foresaw – this great maritime disaster.

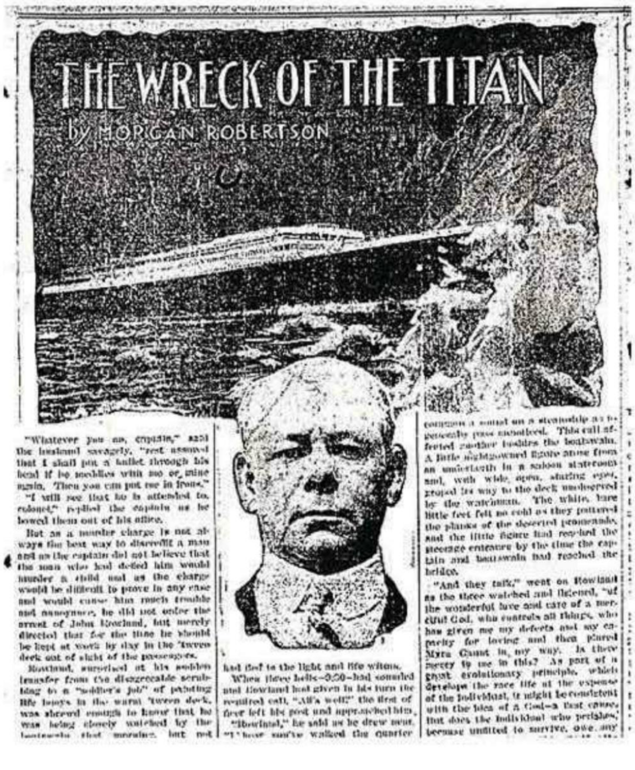
This spring sees the centenary of the sinking of the *RMS Titanic* on 15 April 1912; the ill-fated ship, though, refuses to sink in the popular imagination. The super-liner's fabled luxury and the hubristic tragedy of its end have combined to create an iconic cultural memory, repeatedly resurrected in books and films. The ship was dubbed 'unsinkable'. Who could have dreamt that it would go down on its maiden voyage? Yet many people did just that – premonitory experiences surround the disaster and are woven into the legend of the *Titanic* and those who sailed in her.

MANY SEEM TO HAVE FORESEEN THE SINKING OF THE LINER *TITANIC*

IMAGINATION OR PRECOGNITION?

The majority of premonitory experiences occurred shortly before and during *Titanic*'s maiden voyage, but earlier fictional writings have been hailed as predictions of the disaster. In 1898, American popular author Morgan Robertson published a novel called *Futility, or The Wreck of the Titan*. It parallels the sinking of the *Titanic* in many ways. Although the ship in the book, *Titan*, is on her third, not her maiden, voyage, she is described as "the largest craft afloat and the greatest of the works of men". She is the last word in shipping luxury and safety, being considered unsinkable, with 19 watertight compartments. Like the *Titanic*, she carries insufficient lifeboats, hits an iceberg and sinks in the North Atlantic.

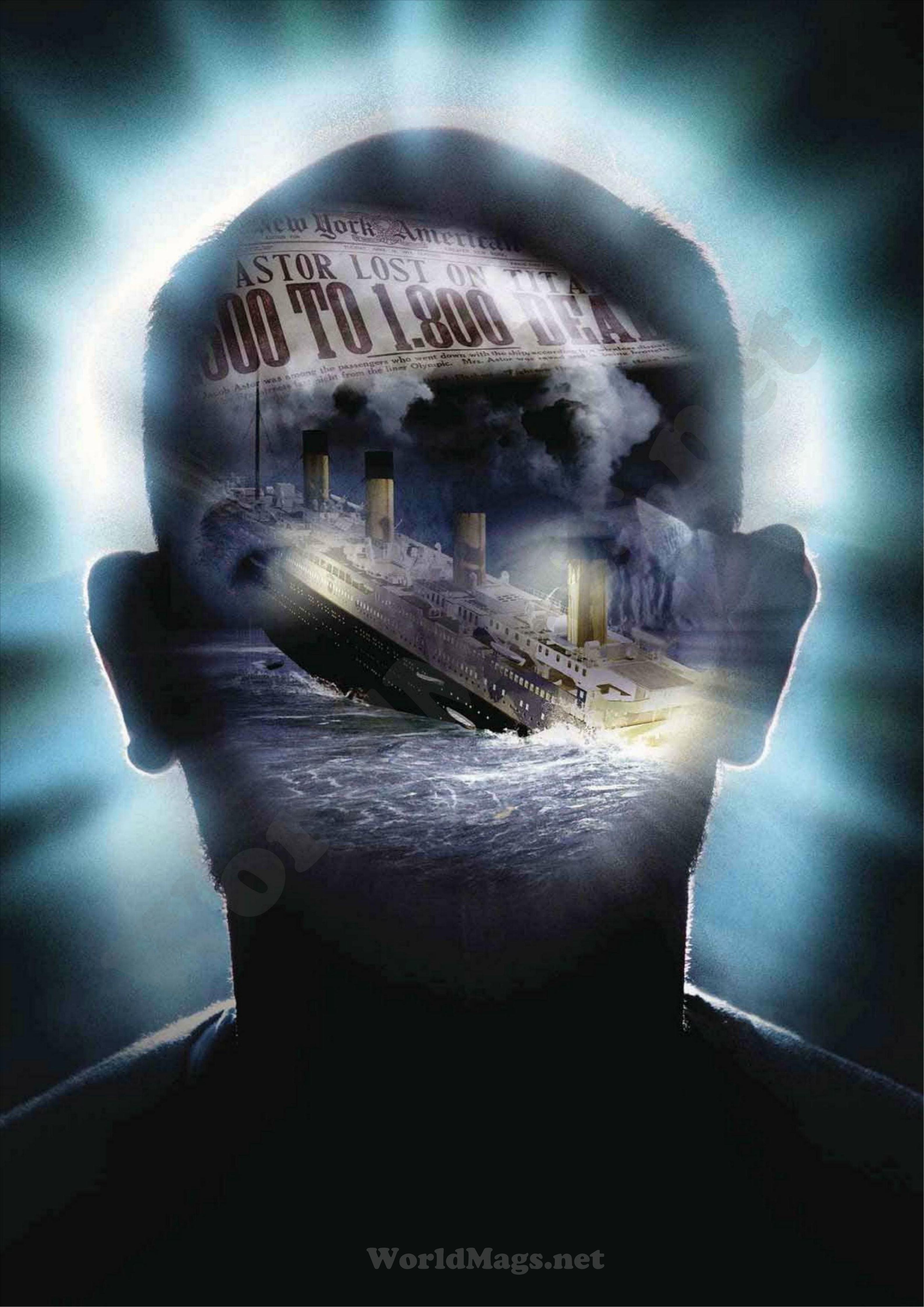
The novel seems to foresee *Titanic*'s fate, 14 years before she sailed; and on its post-*Titanic* re-publication, Robertson claimed he had had some kind of premonition. (His reputation as an oddly prescient writer was later boosted by his 1914 novella *Beyond the Spectrum*, which imagines a Japanese surprise air attack on a US military base in Hawaii; America retaliates by using a 'sun-bomb' on Japan, the ultraviolet rays of which cause blindness and burns). But in the period of developing steam travel, which as the author of numerous maritime yarns Robertson was familiar with, shipwreck was common. Between 1866 and 1911, 50 steamers sank with considerable loss of life.[1] Violet Jessop, a stewardess on *Titanic*, served on *Olympic* (coincidentally, also captained by EJ Smith, the master of *Titanic*) in 1911 when it collided with *HMS Hawke*; and, having been rescued from the *Titanic*, Violet went on to survive the sinking of the *Britannic* (then in use as a WWI hospital ship) in 1916.


THE WRECK OF THE TITAN
by MORGAN ROBERTSON

In 1854, the steamship *Arctic* struck another ship off Canada and sank with the loss of 350 lives, partly due to having insufficient lifeboats. *Arctic*, the pride of the US Collins shipping line, was a state-of-the-art ship built to compete with Cunard for the transatlantic passenger trade. Her sinking made world news and the story may have influenced Roberton's later novel.

In 1886, William T Stead, a prominent English journalist and editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, wrote a story called "How the Mail-Steamer Went Down in Mid-Atlantic". Stead was also a spiritualist (see **FT261:54–57**) and received many warnings about

MAIN ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX TOMLINSON. PHOTO: DAVID NEWTON. MONTAGE: ETIENNE GILFILLAN


New York American
ASTOR LOST ON TITA
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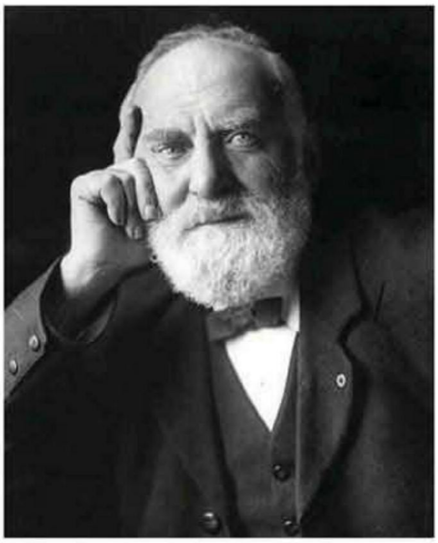
HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

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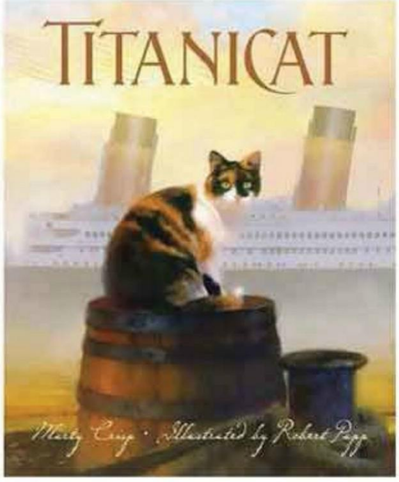
ABOVE LEFT: Violet Jessup, who survived a collision on the *Olympic* in 1911, the *Titanic* disaster in 1912 and the sinking of the *Britannic* in 1916. **ABOVE CENTRE:** Journalist and spiritualist William T Stead. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Major Archibald Butt's forebodings turned out to be justified. **BELOW:** The story of the *Titanic* cat and her litter of kittens has even inspired fictional treatment in a 2008 children's book. **BOTTOM:** Edith Rosenbaum and her lucky toy pig; both survived.


TITANICAT
Marty Crisp · Illustrated by Robert Papp

travel by sea – none of which prevented his sailing on the *Titanic* and sharing her watery grave. In his short story, a steamship sinks on colliding with another vessel and many people drown due to a shortage of lifeboats. In another story, published in 1892, "From the Old World to the New", a clairvoyant aboard the *SS Majestic* assists in rescuing another ship which has struck an iceberg. Of eerie significance is the name Stead gave to the fictitious captain of the *Majestic* in his tale: EJ Smith – the name of *Titanic*'s real-life master.

Common factors in these fictions are the huge size, luxury and efficiency of the ships and the lack of sufficient lifeboats. A perusal of contemporary accounts shows nothing truly precognitory about these concerns. The race for shipping lines to produce bigger, faster, better ships to corner the market in transatlantic travel is well documented. Claims of 'unsinkability' regarding these creations were rebutted by warnings regarding the dangers of huge ships, many specifically aimed at the tendency of shipping lines to neglect the provision of lifeboats to save space for leisure facilities. The propensity of icebergs to drift south into the North Atlantic in springtime, creating shipping hazards, was similarly well known. However, the close parallels between Robertson's *Titan* and *Titanic*, in terms of name, specifications and passenger capacity, and Stead's choice of the exact name of *Titanic*'s captain for the master of the ship in his story, might be seen as suggestive of something more than coincidence at work.

FOREBODINGS & LUCKY ESCAPES

Many people reported forebodings about sailing on the *Titanic*. Those who heeded them had reason to thank their lucky stars. Second engineer Colin McDonald was due to sign on for the ship's maiden voyage but declined the post due to a hunch that something would go wrong. Fireman John Coffey deserted the ship when it docked at Queenstown, Ireland. He later claimed that he had forebodings of disaster, but at the time he told a fellow crewman that he wanted to go and see his mother.

The curious story of Joe Mulholland is mentioned in many accounts of *Titanic*'s voyage. Mulholland, a fireman on the delivery trip from Belfast to Southampton, reportedly befriended a pregnant cat on board. On the quay at Southampton, prior to re-signing for the voyage to New York, he saw the cat carry its kittens off the ship. Taking this as a portent of disaster, he refused to sign on again. That there really was a cat with kittens on board at some point is not in doubt, as Violet Jessop mentions it in her memoir, and fireman John Podesta, who survived the sinking, claimed to have witnessed the incident.

Many of the forebodings reported can be explained by widespread fears of sea travel and of maiden voyages in particular. In addition to the contemporary dangers of steam travel, we might add concerns about the reliability of new ships. A number of passengers booked onto the *Titanic* cancelled their passages due to fears of maiden voyages. Lady Duff-Gordon's fears of travelling on a new ship were only allayed by her husband's offer to accompany her; both were fortunate to survive the sinking.

Other forebodings, focused on the ship itself, may also be interpreted as reasonable safety concerns. As *Titanic* left Southampton, the wash of her passage caused another ship, *SS New York*, to break her moorings, and a collision was narrowly avoided. Many passengers commented on this in letters written home. Alfred Rowe, a Liverpool businessman, wrote to his wife, "…she (the ship) is too big… and is a positive danger to all other shipping in port…" [2]

American Jennie Hanson's concerns are not so easily dismissed. She and her husband were returning from visiting relatives in Denmark. Before leaving her hometown in Wisconsin, she told her brother she was sure the boat would sink or something awful would happen to her. She went as far as leaving instructions for her funeral.

TITANIC
DISASTER
GREAT LOSS
OF LIFE
EVENING NEWS

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: On 16 April 1912, a London newspaper boy sells copies of the *Evening News* telling of the disaster. Two days earlier, in New York, Benita Guggenheim had a premonition that something had gone wrong with the ship and bought a paper shortly before the *Titanic* went down, taking her father with it.

Jennie survived the sinking; her husband and brother did not.

Before embarking, and throughout the voyage, Mrs William Bucknell told everyone who would listen that she was deathly afraid of the ship and that it was doomed. Boarding the lifeboat and meeting up with her friend Margaret (Molly) Brown, she declared, "Didn't I tell you? I knew it!" [3]

US Major Archibald Butt felt strangely uneasy about his forthcoming holiday for weeks before he left, deliberately putting his papers in order in case of mishap. His European trip accomplished, he told an Italian Minister that he now felt safe because he would be boarding the unsinkable *Titanic*. He drowned in the disaster.

The forebodings of some passengers were almost prophetic. Others were warned of danger by fortune-tellers. Esther Hart had profound misgivings from the moment her husband decided to start a new life in Canada. When she heard they would be sailing on the *Titanic*, and that the ship was thought unsinkable, she declared that such vanity flew in the face of God and that the boat would never reach America. On board, she insisted on sitting up all night, warmly dressed in anticipation of the disaster which she was sure would occur. When the collision came, she was ready. She and her small daughter survived, but her husband was lost.

Benita Guggenheim, daughter of the American millionaire Benjamin Guggenheim, was returning from school on the afternoon of 14 April. Passing a newspaper seller, she suddenly demanded that her mother buy a newspaper, insisting that something had happened to the ship her father was sailing on. The time then on the *Titanic* was between 9.30 and 10.30pm, one to two hours before the collision. Her father went down with the ship.

Danger by water is a common prediction of fortune-tellers, yet some of the warnings given to *Titanic* passengers were specific enough to suggest true clairvoyance. In 1907, Dr Minahan was told by a gypsy that he would die on a steamer on his second trip abroad. The doctor ignored the prediction, although he put his affairs in order before sailing on the *Titanic*, his second sea voyage. These precautions proved prudent, as he perished with the ship.

In January 1912, the Fortune family, from Winnipeg, was in Cairo and Alice Fortune was told by a street fortune-teller, who saw her adrift in an open boat, losing everything but her life, to beware of sea travel. Although she and her three daughters were saved, she lost her husband and son on the *Titanic*.

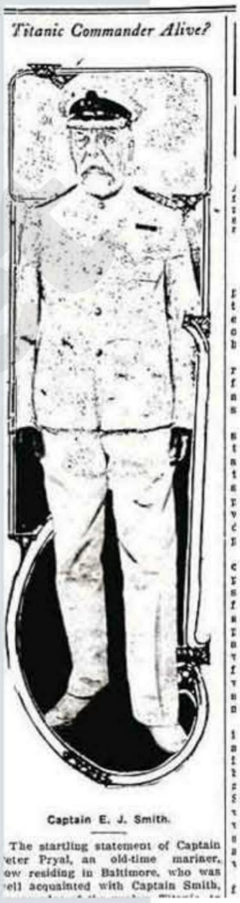
Edith Rosenbaum, an American fashion journalist, was returning to New York from the Paris shows. On 9 April, a clairvoyant told her she would lose all her possessions and warned her to cancel the sea passage she had booked. This so rattled Edith that she made two attempts to leave the *Titanic* before it sailed and, being most concerned for her collection of gowns, only resigned herself to the sailing when told her luggage would have to remain on board. She wrote to her secretary from Queenstown saying she could not overcome her premonition of trouble. Edith was saved from the wreck, but the only possession she retained was the lucky toy pig which she carried everywhere.

Occurrences perceived as omens also created dark forebodings, in most cases with little justification. In Belfast, at a press inspection prior to *Titanic*'s sea trials in March, a luncheon table collapsed, giving rise to worries that something might happen to the ship. On 9 April, steward Arthur Lewis's wife was helping her husband prepare his uniform when the White Star insignia on his cap fell apart. Lewis scoffed at his wife's interpretation of this as a bad omen, and went off on the *Titanic*. He did, however, survive the disaster.

Further portents were seen on the ship itself. On 11 April, passengers waiting to board at Queenstown were horrified to see a black face peering from one of the ship's funnels. Believing that nothing human

MORE TITANIC ODDITIES

CAPTAIN SMITH RETURNS



Titanic Commander Alive?

Captain E. J. Smith.

The startling statement of Captain
eter Pryal, an old-time mariner,
ow residing in Baltimore, who was
ell acquainted with Captain Smith,

Three months after the *Titanic* sank, Captain Peter Pryall was walking through the streets of Baltimore. He was astonished to see his old friend, Captain EJ Smith, master of the ill-fated ship, standing at a street corner. Pryall approached him and said, "Captain Smith, how are you?"

The man replied, "Very well, Pryall but please don't detain me, I am on business."

Pryall followed him to the railway station and saw him buy a ticket to Washington. As he departed, Smith said: "Be good, shipmate, until we meet again."

Pryall insisted he could not have been mistaken, having known Smith for many years and being of excellent character himself, had no reason to invent the incident. It remains unexplained. (G Behe: *Titanic: Psychic Forewarnings of a Tragedy*, 1988, p51.)

A HORSEY TALE

Isador Straus, owner of the US department store Macy's, sent his favourite horse, Bess, to pasture on a farm while he travelled in Europe with his wife. On 14 April, Bess was stabled as usual. That night, both Straus and his wife perished on the *Titanic*. The next morning, the young and healthy horse lay dead in her stall and no explanation could be found for her demise. (Behe, p43).

TITANIC MODEL SHOCK

In April 1912, a model of the *Titanic* was sent to England from New York for exhibition. On 30 April, when the model was unpacked, a rent from the bow to the upper deck was discovered and eight of the 20 lifeboats were missing. (Behe, p44).

OTHER PREMONITIONS OF DISASTER AT SEA

THE DISAPPEARING WARATAH

COURTESY OF MICHAEL W POCOCK AND WWW.MARITIMEQUEST.COM

In 1909, the immigrant ship *SS Waratah* set off on her second voyage, bound for Australia. One passenger, named Sawyer, had repeated dreams of standing at the rail and seeing the figure of a mediæval knight, covered in blood, rise from the sea, screaming, "The *Waratah*, the *Waratah*!" The ship's officers remonstrated with Sawyer for relating this dream to other passengers and he packed his bags and left the ship at Durban on 27 July. The ship was seen two days later as she passed another steamer and then she disappeared. Extensive searches failed to find any trace of her. In the 1950s, a pilot from the South African Air Force spotted the wreck of a great ship in clear water and flew back to report the finding of the *Waratah*. On his return, the wreck had vanished and its whereabouts remain unknown to this day. *Source: www.titanichistoricalsociety.net.*

TITANIC SAVES THE TITANIAN

William C Reeves, lookout on the tramp steamer *Titanian* in April 1935, claimed to have had a strong premonition of danger that saved the ship from the same fate as *Titanic*. Reeves had been reading Morgan Robertson's novel *Titan* and began thinking about *Titanic* and her lookout, Fred Fleet, who failed to see the deadly iceberg until the last minute. Overcome by feelings of imminent danger, Reeves rang the ship's alarm, even though no hazard was in sight. When the ship stopped, a huge iceberg was perceived and the *Titanian* was found to be surrounded by ice floes. It remained stranded for several days until rescued and towed to Newfoundland. According to some accounts, Reeves was born on 15 April 1912 – the day the *Titanic* sank. *Sources: http://bit.ly/xlBetA (library.thinkquest.org); http://bit.ly/zhyMvj (freewebs.com).*

SEVEN COFFINS FOR THE ISIDORE

On 30 November 1842, the sailing ship *Isidore* foundered in a snowstorm at Bald Head cliffs in Cape Neddick, Maine, with the loss of all 15 crew. Many had reported dreams and premonitions before sailing. One sailor dreamed of seven coffins in a row on the shore. When he asked who they were for, a voice told him one was for him. Another crew member, the ship's carpenter, was so frightened that he decamped and hid until the ship had gone. The morning after the storm, wreckage from the ship was spotted around the cliffs. Only seven bodies were found. The carpenter was the sole survivor. The ghost of the *Isidore* is reputed still to patrol the waters round the Cape, searching for her absent crewman. Source: http://bit.ly/wCDEjm (paranexus.org).

SALVATION ARMY SEER

COURTESY OF MICHAEL W POCOCK AND WWW.MARITIMEQUEST.COM

A large party of Salvation Army officers and band members was booked to sail on the *RMS Empress of Ireland* from Liverpool to Canada on 25 May 1914. Before the ship sailed, Mrs Nettice Simcoe, a Salvationist Major, dreamed of crowds in mourning. On hearing this at breakfast, several passengers cancelled their trip. They were wise to do so, as the ship collided with the collier *SS Storstad* and sank in the icy waters of Nova Scotia on 29 May with over 1,000 lives lost. Of 175 Salvationists on board, only 25 survived. Mrs Simcoe was not among them. *Source: http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com.*

could survive the heat and smoke, they assumed the apparition was an unlucky omen. In fact, *Titanic*'s fourth funnel was a dummy, and clearly one of the stokers had climbed up to enjoy the view. On the same day, a Miss Keane and her nephew Michael waited to board the ship when the boy remarked that some numbers written on the bow, "– 3909 – 04", if read backwards as a mirror-image would read "NO POPE" and this rather far-fetched proposition struck his devoutly Catholic aunt as a bad omen. She proceeded to harangue everyone around her with her forebodings, but when the time came she survived the sinking.

On 12 April, William Stead regaled his companions in the first class smoking room with a tale of a cursed Egyptian mummy case which bore an inscription that, if repeated, would result in the teller's violent death. After the sinking, a myth arose that the mummy was actually on the ship (see **FT136:40–43**); although this was false, seven of the eight men present that night were lost to the sea. Stead had recently come into the possession of an ebony and silver crucifix which supposedly once belonged to Catherine the Great and was said to be charged with black magic; he had been warned not to carry this item on his person as "unpleasant astral conditions" had been detected in connection with it and it "would be specially inimical to him" unless he was specially protected. It is not known if the crucifix was on the ship, but Stead still owned it at the time of sailing.[4]

On 13 April, fireman John Podesta was in a boiler room with another stoker when a number of rats ran past. After the sinking, Podesta realised that the rats had run from the starboard bow, the site of the collision with the iceberg. Podesta survived to tell this tale, as well as the story of the ship's cat; he seems to have had an affinity for animal omens.

Many of these supposed omens can be explained as ordinary events given exaggerated significance by superstitious passengers, but the apparently random and powerful nature of premonitions experienced through dreams and visions requires more careful consideration.

PREMONITORY DREAMS & VISIONS

Another story concerning WT Stead relates that, in September 1911, he was told by a clairvoyant called W de Kerlor that he would soon travel to America. De Kerlor said he saw the back half of a great black ship, and where the name should be was a wreath of flowers. It seems an uncannily accurate image of the last moments of the Titanic, her stern rearing up before plunging to the depths. A little later, de Kerlor dreamed of struggling in water among many other people and related the dream to Stead, who ignored the psychic's warnings.

John (Jock) Hume, a violinist with the ship's band, told friends that his mother had a premonition in a dream shortly before he signed on for the voyage. She begged him not to go, but he was desperate for the work as his sweetheart was pregnant and he was soon to marry. His mother's dream may have been caused by anxiety about Jock's returning to sea, as he had served on the *Olympic* when it collided with the *Hawke*, but if Jock had listened to her he would have lived to see his child.

Isaac Frauenthal, a New York lawyer returning from his brother's wedding in Nice, dreamed twice of a big steamship sinking, seeing the boat gradually disappear to the accompaniment of the cries of passengers. When the ship struck the iceberg, Isaac rushed his family on deck, while others laughed off any danger to the 'unsinkable' ship. Thanks to his prompt action, all three were saved.

Eugene Ryan (or Daly), a steerage passenger from Athlone, Co. Westmeath, embarked at Queenstown and entertained other passengers by playing the Irish pipes. Despite this, he repeatedly said that he had dreamt the ship would sink before reaching New York. Shortly before the collision, he told Bertha Mulvihill that the ship would sink that night. Bertha was saved, but Eugene drowned.

Michel Navratil boarded *Titanic* with his two small sons, under the name of Hoffman. Back in France, his estranged wife Marcelle frantically searched for her children when their father didn't return them after the Easter holidays. She had no idea that he had left the country with them and was planning a new life in his native South America. On the night of the sinking, Michel appeared to her in a dream, handing her a black-bordered envelope. During the next few weeks, Marcelle, reading accounts of two orphan children saved from the disaster, repeatedly dreamed of her missing infants and of funerals. It was not until 22 April that she recognised similarities between the children in the newspaper stories and her own boys and began to suspect the babies might be hers. Despite her dreams, the idea seemed incredible – but she was finally reunited with the children on 16 May.

1912-2012: THE COSTA CONCORDIA

Many people have attributed strange significance to the wreck of the *MS Costa Concordia* on 13 January this year, occurring as it did in the centenary year of the *Titanic* disaster. Bloggers on the Storm2k website commented that Commander Schettino told a Czech newspaper in 2010 that he would not care to be the commander of the *Titanic*. Diners in one of the *Costa Concordia*'s restaurants told how the hit theme song from the film *Titanic*, Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On", was playing when the ship hit the rocks and Valentina Capuano, a survivor from the wreck, told how her grandmother survived the sinking of the *Titanic*. Finally, the island on which the *Costa Concordia* grounded, Giglio, shares the same name as the valet of Benjamin Guggenheim, who travelled with his master on the *Titanic* and drowned alongside him. A strange string of coincidences; time will tell if there are more.
Sources: *www.storm2k, 14 Jan; D.Telegraph, 18 Jan 2012.*

Two visions experienced by people who had no connection with the *Titanic* are perhaps the most striking recorded examples of apparent precognition connected to the tragedy.

Blanche Marshall and her family gathered on the flat roof of their house on the Isle of Wight to see *Titanic* leave Southampton on 10 April. As the great liner traversed the Solent, Mrs Marshall suddenly shouted that the ship would sink before it reached America. All present tried to reassure her that the vessel was unsinkable but she became violently agitated crying, "Do something you fools, I can see hundreds of people struggling in the icy water. Are you all so blind that you are going to let them drown?" [5] Her distress continued until she was proved correct when news broke that the unsinkable ship had gone down. Blanche Marshall not only foresaw the *Titanic* disaster but also predicted the sinking of the *RMS Lusitania* in 1915. In April that year, the family planned to sail home to England from New York and had booked tickets for 1 May, but when Blanche saw the date she told her husband to change the reservation, as the ship would sink. Her husband agreed, after much argument, but could only get tickets for the same ship, sailing in two days time. "Oh that's all right," said Blanche, "the *Lusitania* isn't going to sink until the voyage we were going on. I suppose she will be torpedoed as it is too warm for icebergs. Poor things, I feel so sorry for them! However there is nothing we can do about it in wartime." This matter-of-fact observation proved all too true, as the *Lusitania* sailed on 1 May and was sunk by a German torpedo on 7 May. [6]

The most chilling account of all is of a dying child, named only as Jessie. Captain W Rex Sowden, a Salvation Army officer in the town of Kirkudbright, Dumfries & Galloway, was at the bedside of the sick girl on the evening of 14 April 1912. At 11pm, she sat upright saying, "Captain, I'm so afraid, can't you see that big ship sinking in the water?" Sowden told her she had been dreaming but she continued, "The ship is sinking. Look at all those people who are drowning. Someone called Wally is playing a fiddle and coming to you." [7] Shortly afterwards, the Captain heard the latch click and felt a presence in the room, just before Jessie died. Sowden was aghast when news arrived of the sinking of the *Titanic* and he learned that his childhood friend Wallace Hartley, the ship's bandmaster, had been lost. It is not known whether Sowden related this experience to others before news of the sinking broke, so it is impossible to verify; but it remains an intriguing story.

CONCLUSION

This account includes only some of the many seemingly premonitory experiences of the sinking of the *Titanic*. How we interpret them depends on several factors. The presence of contemporary documentation and verification by witnesses adds significant weight; documentation after the fact is obviously subject to distortion through inaccurate memories, repetition and hearsay. In addition, later reporting of premonitions may be skewed by hindsight, investing everyday mishaps with a significance not perceived at the time. Some misgivings experienced by passengers can be explained as practical observations of potential dangers, or resulting from the superstitious natures of people like Edith Rosenbaum, given to carrying lucky tokens and consulting clairvoyants. Sailors, too, are reputedly superstitious and no doubt embellished the legends surrounding the *Titanic*. Yet, after taking these factors into consideration, there remains a weight of testimony, much of it carrying an emotional power that goes beyond rational explanation, which suggests that at least some of these experiences should be classed as genuinely anomalous phenomena.

ABOVE: A photograph said to be of the iceberg which sank the *RMS Titanic*, taken a few days after the sinking. Rumour has it the German steamship *Prinz Adalbert* was sailing by an iceberg with signs of red paint on it and, due to this anomaly, someone on board photographed it. Later, the crew learned that the *Titanic*, whose keel had been painted red, had collided with an iceberg and the theory of this being the fateful object started circulating. Some researchers disagree, arguing that the red marks were simply algae.

NOTES

1 JH Mowbray (ed): *Sinking of the Titanic: Eyewitness Accounts*, Dover Publications Inc, New York, 1912, reprinted 1998, pxiii.

2 Alan James Scarth: *Titanic and Liverpool*, Liverpool University Press, 2009, p100.

3 George Behe: *Titanic: Psychic Forewarnings of a Tragedy*, Patrick Stephens Ltd, Wellingborough, 1988, p129.

4 A Mr Dillon of the *Daily Telegraph* recalled: "Our last meeting took place on the 3rd of January. He (Mr Stead), my secretary, and I, lunched together at the Holborn Restaurant. During lunch he told me a thrilling story of an apparition of Catherine the Great, and the sudden appearance of a talisman from Poland, which brought ill-luck to everyone who possessed it.

"'I have it now,' he went on, 'and I am curious to see whether any mischief will befall me, and what form it will take. Is it not thrilling?'

"Before lunch was over it was a question of my keeping the talisman (which I never saw) for a time, to test its fatal potency. But I declined. That was the last I saw of WT Stead." Edith K Harper: *Stead the Man: Personal Reminiscences*, William Rider & Son, 1918, pp225–227.

5 Behe, *op.cit.*, p139.

6 *Ibid*, p140.

7 *Ibid*, p144.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

CAROL FENLON is a freelance writer with a PhD in creative writing, interested in all things bizarre. Her first novel, *Consider The Lilies*, the story of a feral child, won the Impress Novel Prize 2007. Carol lives in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, and can be found at www.carolfenlon.com.

117. The Committee for the Eradication of Blind Faith

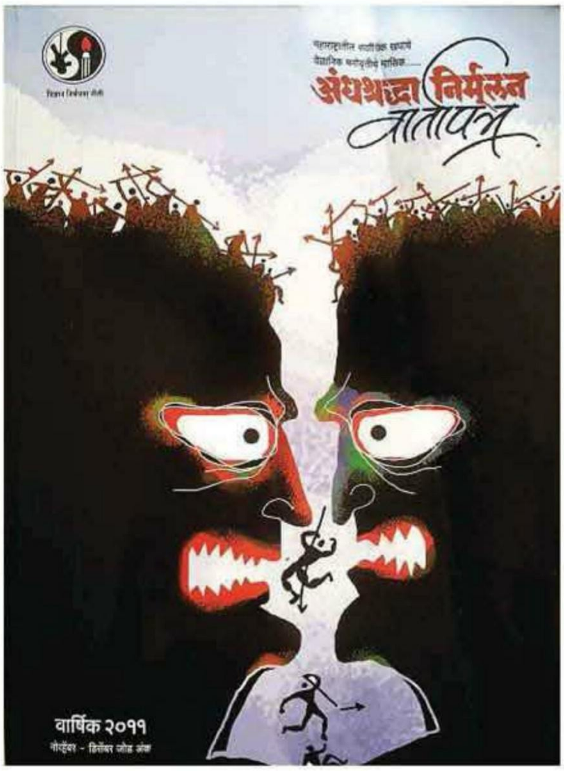
GEORGE BINNING meets the leaders of India's nascent rationalist movement as it hopes to see its 'Black Magic Bill' become law in a society dominated by religious and spiritual traditions.

India has long been revered as a unique example of a secular, cosmopolitan democracy in which spiritual traditions still play an everyday role in over a billion lives – "a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads," as Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, once described it.

But across the country, groups of activists are questioning this rather romantic notion. Having seen the progress of truly secular societies, they are starting to blame India's more superstitious practices for much of the injustice that exists in the country today. Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS) – the Maharashtra Committee for the Eradication of Blind Faith – is one such group, and its members have declared themselves rationalists and sceptics.

I visited founding president Dr Narendra Dabholkar, Pune district vice-president Mr Deepak Girme and Mr Prabhakar Nanawaty, editor of the Committee's magazine *Thought and Action*, to learn about their mission and hear the latest on the controversial 'Black Magic Bill'.

"Basically we want to convert people who are superstitious, people who blindly believe in things, to a rational way of thinking," says Mr Girme sitting in the Committee's Pune Office. "You see human beings are not *Homo sapiens sapiens*, they are *Homo half sapiens*. We feel that human beings should evolve into nobler animals, who will be able to live in harmony with each other, and with nature around them."



ABOVE: A striking cover from *Thought and Action*, the magazine published by the Commitee.

Witches are burned and demons thrashed out

Later that morning, Dr Dabholkar is announcing to the press that Ajit Pawar, deputy chief minister of Maharashtra, has given his backing to the 'Black Magic Bill' which they have been trying to push through the Maharashtra Assembly for 16 years; he has also guaranteed the support of the Nationalist Congress Party when the bill returns to the assembly. They will be a valuable ally against opposition from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shiv Sena.

With this good news, Girme and Nanawaty are in a jovial mood, despite the fact that their work is normally an uphill struggle. Their website – antisuperstition.org – is subject to regular 'denial of service' attacks, but Mr Girme doesn't mind. "We don't bother to find out who it is," he shrugs, "we just know they exist. Instead we have set up five websites so we can replace it when one goes down."

Under the proposed law, the practices of black magicians and *aghoris* (members of a taboo sect reviled by many as non-Hindu) the performance of miracles for financial gain and rituals that cause physical harm, will all be prohibited. The detailed list of banned practices includes violent exorcism and forcing a person to drink footwear-soaked water, inhale chilli smoke or be hung from a roof by the hair.

The bill has been hotly disputed in India: after protests from the Wakari (a monotheistic offshoot of Hinduism) the term 'mental harm' was removed from the bill, but the Wakari proudly declare that their annual pilgrimage on foot to Pandharpur still causes them a certain amount of physical harm. Although the bill "will not apply to any religious rite or ritual in which no physical or financial loss is caused to any individual", there are also concerns from the Hindu community that "one has to take physical or psychological efforts or monetary harm when one performs any [religious] act", potentially subjecting all Hindu rituals to the new law.

When we join Dr Dabholkar at the press conference at Sane Gurujee Hall, named after Maharashtra's beloved social activist, it turns out they have another piece of news. They have given the government one month to close down a Muslim *dargah* (shrine) in Chalisgoan or they will stage a "peaceful agitation". According to Dabholkar, around 60 patients are being held there and submitted to torture because of superstitious taboos around mental illness. This can involve being chained to a wall and beaten or forced to drink dirty water in order to purge evil.

"People think they are being possessed by something, so automatically they will get treatment from somebody who also thinks this. But the authorities should not allow them to use such wrong treatment," says Dr Dabholkar. He also offered Committee resources to look after the victims, accusing the government of not taking mental health seriously enough.

"Who is going to look after these psychotics? That responsibility is taken by the Committee; we are hiring a team of psychiatrists who are ready to treat them. Out of the total expenditure on health in India, only one per cent goes to mental health. We have hardly 4,000 psychiatrists in a country of over 1.2

billion people. The government needs to pay more attention to mental health."

As the press conference winds down, the local journalists round on me and start asking whether *Fortean Times* supports MANS's work. Should Britain have laws against black magic? And if not, why not? The following day, the *Mid-Day News* reports that "a 25-year-old rationalism activist from the UK… formally declared his support to the MANS" and shows a photo of this bewildered and jetlagged reporter.

But the Committee's line does raise the question: is the harm done by exploitative superstition a necessary price for total religious freedom in India? Perhaps this seemingly inalienable right only works on the assumption that each citizen is a rational, free-thinking individual? This is not an assumption shared by MANS.

"This species should evolve into a better species, not the one we are now. We are a miserable creature that does not know what's good for us," says Girme back in the office.

Of course, India already has laws to prevent physical, emotional and financial harm, but they are regularly flouted in the name of the supernatural. While witches are burned and demons thrashed out of the mentally ill, dubious gurus accumulate huge riches from poverty-stricken devotees; the committee believes tighter legislation is needed.

MANS has almost 3,000 volunteers working in 180 branches in Maharashtra and their monthly magazine, *Thought and Action*, has a circulation of 15,000. They organise debates and lectures in rural areas, have an inflatable travelling planetarium and (perhaps taking their cue from high-profile US 'skeptic' James Randi) offer a reward of 2.1 million rupees (£270,000) to any 'godman' who can perform a miracle in font of a MANS judge. Their campaign against superstition becomes a lens through which to view all the issues facing Indian society: women's rights, systemic corruption, mental health and basic education all fall within their purview.

Mr Girme and most of the MANS executives are committed atheists, with some sympathy towards Buddhism; but atheism is a word that still carries an element of danger in India, and they are not so foolhardy as to push it onto the society they are trying to change; they already oppose the (illegal but prevalent) caste system, unaffordably large marriages and astrology. Instead, Girme explains, the committee tries to persuade people to believe in more modern (and Western?)-sounding Gods.

"If we want to go to them we have to talk their language: I believe in a God that lives in my heart, in your heart, that is all-knowing in your mind; so you have to be careful because you can't fool him.

"You can't make a business out of a God and you can't have a foolish God – if you flatter him, he's not going to give you something. You don't put that idol in a temple and treat it like a child. It is a stupid way of doing it.

"You have to improve the concept of a God. What is becoming for a modern human, being a God should also be like that, not like the ancient God. So slowly, slowly, people are changing."

Their pragmatic approach to religion and social improvement is about winning minds over hearts, an approach inspired by Lokayata, the atheistic, materialistic, and naturalistic philosophy of 6th-century India. While staying committed to religious tolerance, rationalists like Mr Girme envisage a future in which no sensible person could possibly draw different conclusions about the world than do he and his colleagues. Asked where religions would fit with man's 'evolved' state, he exclaims: "What religions? The religions that came in five, six, seven thousand years ago, when they were childish, as Einstein says. They didn't know the answers so they invented religions. Lokayata says we don't need religions.

"You can make civilised rules for each other: you don't spit here, I don't spit here. You don't run off with my wife, I don't run off with your wife. You don't rob me, I don't rob you, and so on.

"Then you say we must not proliferate like rabbits, because we are pushing out all the other species. No place for tigers, elephants, or anything. We will not survive that way."

Population control is not always a popular idea in the West, but it perhaps becomes more persuasive when you look out of your window on a sea of people that's more than doubled in the last 30 years. Mr Girme argues that the human race should be drawn to his rational conclusion: "Eugenics is a bad word, but unless you have a healthy body and a healthy brain, you can't be a *Homo sapiens sapiens*. So you're supposed to strive for that. People are doing the research, so that you can get the best fœtus and put it into the womb, so you have a brilliant son and a brilliant daughter. Then people will stop producing so many babies.

"How much money is spent in India on religions? More than is collected by the government in taxes. You know why China turned around? Because chairman Mao came along and said, 'Boss! No religion.' Then China improved."

The progress of irreligious China might impress Mr Girme, but he laments the collapse of secularism in Iraq: "Why did they have to get rid of Saddam Hussain? They could have befriended him, got into him."

While the Committee for the Eradication of Blind Faith views the supernatural with heavy scepticism, their belief in rationalism appears to be quite zealous. Johannes Quack, a German social scientist, spent three months studying MANS on a teaching tour, discussing the topic of Indian Rationalism in his book *Disenchanting India*. Here he draws parallels between the behaviours of Indian rationalist movements and of religious believers. He makes note of some members' use of the words "mission" and "convert". He told me that Indian rationalism had divided opinion in the Western scientific community.

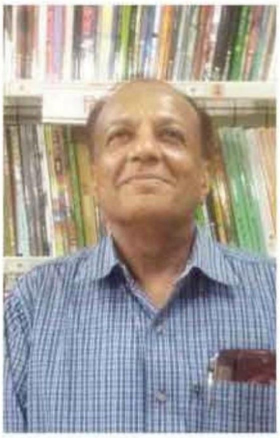
"As a social scientist, I tried to keep a 'neutral' view – some speak of 'methodological agnosticism' – with respect to MANS," says Quack. "This was not always easy, since some of my colleagues would openly criticise the rationalists for 'destroying the local knowledge system' or 'mental colonialism' while others think that they are doing a pretty good job because they spread 'scientific temper' and are therefore allies of scientists."

Following the press conference, we eat in a delicious Pune restaurant while Mr Girme describes how MANS has transformed his life. The Committee is very proactive about healthy living – it is irrational to be fat, or addicted to anything. He does not smoke, and tells me he has lost 7kg (15lb) since becoming an atheist. He is well travelled, having visited Europe, Australia and, at a conference in Seattle, met Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens. Girme says that having been able to study in English was crucial to his development. "It meant I got to read a wide range of books that are predominantly in English. Plus I got to communicate with other people in India because I could speak English. "

The Committee has a bookshop near its office, where they sell rationalist literature not widely available in India.

Rationalism here has matured under very different influences to those in the West, and arguably has yet to fully develop. But the Committee could be a positive force and make a significant difference to popular thinking in India.

I'd wish them luck… but I don't think they'd see that as helpful to their particular cause. **FT**



PIX: GEORGE BINNING

TOP LEFT: Prabhakar Nanawaty standing in front of the MANS bookshop.

TOP RIGHT: Pune district Vice President, Deepak Girme.

ABOVE: Committee Founding President, Dr Narendra Dabholkar

SOURCES

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WIRED FOR GOD?

CHARLES FOSTER concludes his investigation of spiritual experience and examines the strange business of religion and consciousness.

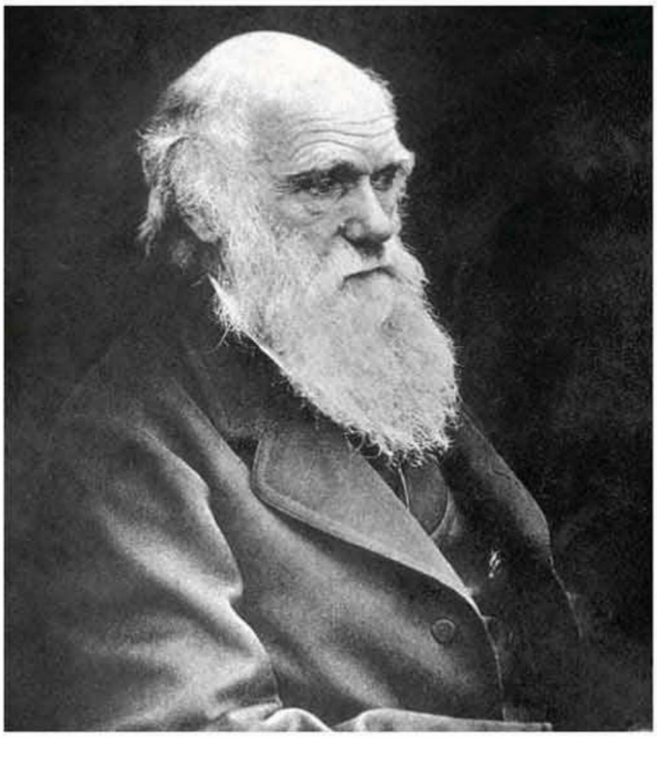
Every religion has noted, and given some theological spin to, the 'spiritual' experiences which are the inheritance of all human beings. Just occasionally, the experiences have been violently repudiated. Some of the actually and metaphorically buttoned-up conservative evangelicals of Protestantism, for instance, insist that all sensation and experience are demonic distractions from the divinely ordained imperatives of evangelism and Bible-reading. But even they have theologically embarrassing orgasms and unwanted epiphanies. Most people are more positive, or at least more respectful, about spiritual experience. Most religions have seen spiritual experience as the whisperings of God, or the response of our nerve-endings when we're in His presence.

RELIGION IS A DISTRACTION FROM DARWIN'S IMPERATIVES OF EATING AND REPRODUCTION

You don't need a religious creed to draw religious conclusions from spiritual experiences. Those conclusions seem pretty much inevitable. Rightly or wrongly (and we'll come to the rights and wrongs in a moment), most people who have these experiences talk about them in frankly theological language. Look at the reports from the wilder frontiers of the drug culture: they read like the ecstatic litanies of mediæval mystics. The association between experience and belief is close and very, very old.

Religion presents a profound problem for the reductionists. It exacts a tremendous thermodynamic price. It's a dangerous distraction from the Darwinian imperatives of eating and reproduction, and its encouragement of altruism is Darwinian heresy. Yes, of course there have been attempts to squeeze altruism into the Darwinian paradigm (notably in the form of kin selection, the now rather disreputable group selection, and the game theory-inspired reciprocal altruism), but the more educated and honest of the Darwinian faithful look slightly queasy when they're presented with them. Even if altruism confers a demonstrable selective advantage once it is seeded in a population, it's hard to see how natural selection would have allowed it to spring up in the first place.

Richard Dawkins, the High Priest of the reductionists, acknowledges very frankly (as his less educated hierophants tend not to do) the embarrassing and challenging problem of religion. He relies on the fig leaf of memetics to cover his embarrassment. But it doesn't work. There are many reasons why not. Stephen Jay Gould articulated one of the most potent. Memes operate horizontally. Genes operate vertically. A horizontal influence would be so much stronger than the vertical one that the subtle selection of genetic characteristics upon which natural selection depends would be rendered more or less irrelevant. The memetic juggernaut would sweep all before it. But, experimentally, it doesn't. The *Journal of Memetics*, conceived in such hope in 1997, quietly ceased publication in 2005.



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LEFT: Charles Darwin – can his evolutionary paradigm accommodate altruism and religious experience?

FACING PAGE: A Hindu priest offers evening prayers on the banks of the River Ganges; but is he just indulging in anthropomorphic projection?

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INVENTING GOD?

The psychiatrists have tried hard to explain away belief in God. Freud assured us that we're looking wistfully back to the golden age of blissful oneness with our parents. We can't see it, and so we invent God as the idealised father substitute. And then came Laurence McKinney: we're religious because we've forgotten lots of important things that we knew in childhood – things like: "Where do I come from?" This is unbearable for us, and so we invent God as the answer to end all answers.

But it doesn't work. The very youngest children that we can study seem to be emphatically religious. We get less religious, not more religious, as we grow older.

Then there's Stuart Guthrie: children begin by thinking that the world is created by omnipotent, omniscient adults. The adults then disappoint. That disappointment is unbearable for all sorts of reasons, including the psychological necessity of understanding where things come from. We therefore invent God to fill the places left by our clay-footed adult idols.

But, again, it's contrary to the evidence. British schoolchildren from a representative spectrum of backgrounds (not children who came from fundamentalist religious families) were asked where rocks, plants and animals came from. They were given three options: God, people, or no one knows. They were seven times more likely to say "God" than "people". Children are natural creationists. They distinguish very emphatically between what adults can do and what God can do.

But it might be said that these schoolchildren had already been disillusioned with adults and re-illusioned with God. Consider this, then.

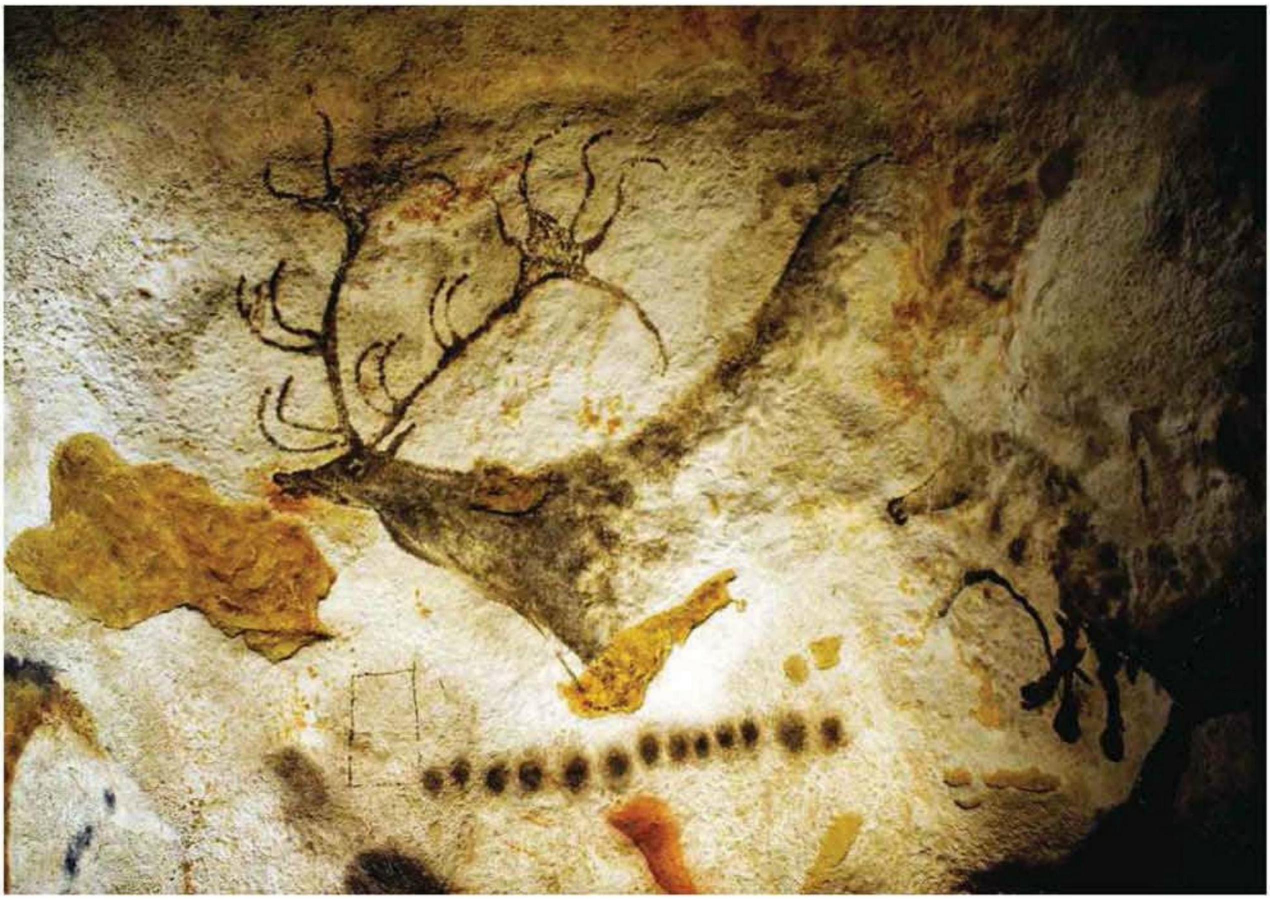
When my son Tom was three, I showed him a matchbox. I'd taken out the matches and replaced them with a little metal duck. I asked him what was in the box: "Matches", he predictably replied. I then opened the box and showed him the duck. "Ah," he said. I then asked him to imagine that his mother had come into the room. "Tom, what would Mummy think was in the box?" "A duck," he replied.

He's now six. I tried the same experiment on him the other day. Now, asked what mummy would think was in the box, he said: "Matches". He knows now that people can hold beliefs that are untrue. But here's the point. Children of *all ages*, when asked what God would think was in the box, would answer, "A duck". They think that God can't be fooled, although mummy can. For them, God always has characteristics that mummy doesn't have.

Children aged three to eight were asked to look through a slit into a darkened box. "What can you see?" they were asked. "Nothing," they replied. The light was turned on in the box, revealing a wooden block inside. The light was then turned off again, and the children were told that cats could see in the dark. Then they were asked which of God, monkeys, humans and cats could see the block. Only God and cats, they said.

This is clear enough. God is not an anthropomorphic projection.

One of the more credible explanations for the origin of religious (or at least religious-ish) beliefs is the Hypersensitive (or hyperactive) Agency Detection Device (HADD). This starts from the observation that humans have a tendency to attribute agency, and thus causation, to improbable candidates. Suppose you're climbing up a hill towards a stone. You stumble and fall. It's very human to think that the stone is the cause of your fall: that the stone is out to get you. And that, says HADD, is because there's a significant selective advantage



GETTY IMAGES / AFP / LIONEL BONAVENTURE

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: Upper Palæolithic paintings in the caves of Lascaux, with animals and entoptic patterns, and one of the red ochre 'hand stencils' at Chauvet, possibly the earliest human 'self portraits'. **BELOW:** Rock art of the San Bushmen, with stylised humanoid figures.

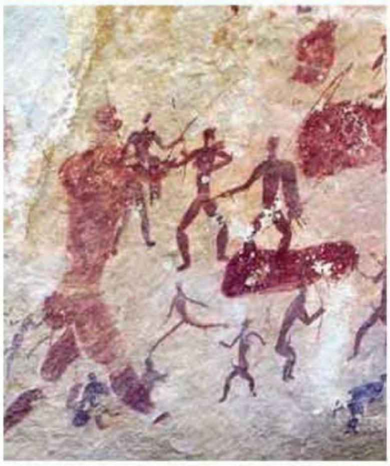
in your brain having a default setting that tends to over-attribute rather than under-attribute agency. Imagine an Upper Palæolithic hunter crouched by a lake, hoping to catch a goose. He hears the reeds rustling. His default setting suggests strongly to him that the rustling is caused by something – perhaps a sabre-toothed tiger. He turns and runs. It's better for him to have his default setting this way round than the other. If, only once, he concludes wrongly that the rustling isn't hostile, it'll be the only time: he'll be eaten. Any number of false positives would be preferable.

HADD doesn't do a very good job with God. It is excellent at basic animism, poltergeists, ghosts, things that go bump in the night, and superstitious neurosis generally. But it founders when asked to explain, for instance, what Tom thought God would think was in the matchbox. To cut a complex story short, HADD doesn't conjure gods, and if it could, it couldn't give them the qualities that even unbrainwashed children attribute to him – in particular omnipotence and omniscience.

REVOLUTION IN THE HEAD

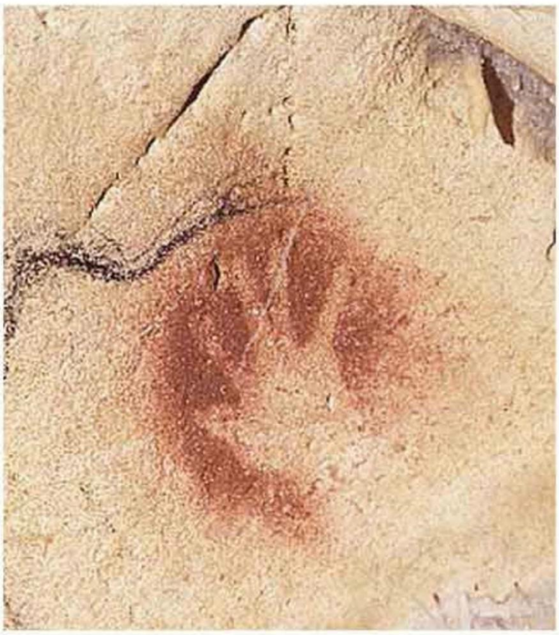
What does the archæological record say? Go to a decent museum, and walk along the human timeline. It is really pretty boring for a while. Our very distant ancestors weren't very charismatic. And then, about 45,000 years ago, in the Upper Palæolithic, there's an exuberant explosion of creativity. The display cases are filled with artefacts that indicate not only a capacity to symbolise – to create mental models of the world and test them in our heads and in various physical media – but a plain rejoicing in that capacity. And it's at the same time that we see the first unequivocal signs of religion. These new humans, into whom a new kind of life had been breathed, buried their dead, and did so in ways that indicate that they believed that physical death wasn't the end.

IN THE UPPER PALÆOLITHIC THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION OF CREATIVITY



The suddenness of this revolution is disputed. The more we excavate in under-dug Africa, the more interesting the Middle Palæolithic seems to be. But there's no doubt about the significance of the revolution. Nor is there any doubt that, in the long history of human evolution, it occurred in a relatively short time. But what triggered it? The short answer is that nobody knows. But one of the most respectable suggestions comes from the anthropologist David Lewis-Williams.

If we think about the cave paintings of Upper Palæolithic Europe we think, rightly, of animals. They are beautifully done by artists who were superb naturalists. They knew how rhino ran; how deer threw their heads when they panicked; how the intestines of disembowelled bison uncoiled. But they are not simple bestiaries. Galloping amongst the naturalistic animals are gorgeous monstrosities: therianthropes (part-human, part-animal hybrids) and chimæras assembled from the parts of different animals. The artists make use of natural features in the rock to give the animals life. A bulge in the rock becomes a head or the swelling of a muscle. There is an inescapable feeling that the visible animal is pushing through into the cave from a world on the other side of the stone wall. The animals are



GETTY IMAGES / AFP / DIRECTION REGIONALE DES AFFAIRES CULTURELLES

never depicted as running on the ground. Indeed, they never have any real spatial context other than by reference to the cave wall itself. You never see them against a mountain, or a tree, or fording a river. They seem to float. There are other things too: banks of wavy and zigzag lines, chequerboard patterns, ladders, webs, honeycombs and dots. These other images are often superimposed on the laboriously executed animal figures. Are they simple vandalistic graffiti painted by Cro-Magnon yobs? If they are, the yobs seem to have got bolder or busier as the Upper Palaeolithic wore on. By the time we get to the Magdalenian era (about 17,000–12,000 years ago) the patterns are everywhere. They are often in vertiginously or claustrophobically inaccessible places.

Paintings from this period are common in Africa too – indeed, they continued to be done there until the 19th century – but they tend to be found on open but sheltered rock faces rather than in the depths of caves. In Africa, human figures are much more common: there are almost as many as there are animal figures. Human figures are very rare indeed in Europe. The African humanoid figures, although again the work of master artists, are often bizarrely elongated. Often they are bent over at the waist, hold their arms behind their back, and some have unmistakably erect phalluses. Sometimes they are pierced with spears or arrows; sometimes some substance seems to be pouring out of their nostrils. Sometimes animals are being led with ropes. Therianthropes and chimæras are ubiquitous, and so are the geometric patterns.

SHAMANS AND SYMBOLS

What's going on? There are four theories. The first is "don't know", and is always to be taken very seriously. The second is "art for art's sake", and is palpable nonsense. Many of the European paintings are painted in places that are immensely difficult and sometimes dangerous to get to. Perhaps the best-known example is the 'Shaft of the Dead Man' in Lascaux, south-west France. You crawl through a narrow crack and then have to be lowered 5m (16ft) down a sheer drop to a ledge. Only then can you see the bird-headed man with four digits on his hand, about to be gored by a dying bison. It's no place for an art gallery, and it wasn't one. The 'pure art' idea can't explain, either, the existence or nature of the geometric patterns, let alone their juxtaposition with the images. It is contradicted, too, by the fact that many of the images are painted directly on top of earlier images. There is plenty of unused wall space.

The third theory, "hunting magic", used to be popular, but can explain the geometric patterns no better than the "pure art" hypothesis. Nor can it deal with the dearth of missiles. If the idea of a painting was to put some sort of spell over a hunted animal in order to guarantee success in the hunt, one would expect to see many of the depicted animals transfixed with spears or arrows. But very few of them are – only 3–4 per cent. We also have a fair idea of the important prey species, and they are not the ones most commonly depicted on the cave walls.

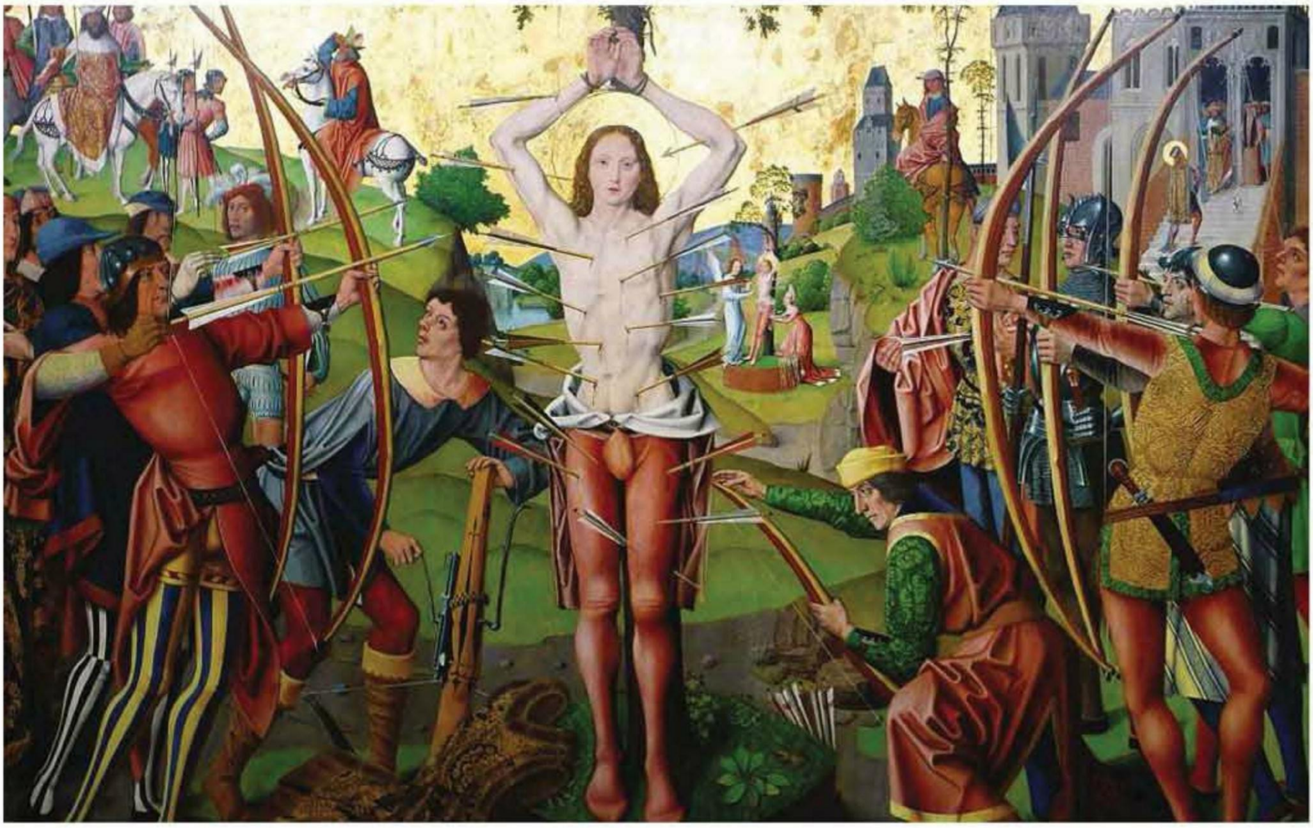
And so we are left with Lewis-Williams's ideas – ideas originally derided, but now become the nearest thing to orthodoxy in the world of Upper Palæolithic archæology. He may have tried to press things slightly too far (his ideas, although powerful, are not necessarily a key that unlocks all aspects of prehistory), but as an explanation for the cave paintings themselves Lewis-Williams is as good as we can get.

He had wondered what to make of the rock art of southern Africa. The scales fell from his eyes when he read interviews with San bushmen recorded in the 1870s by the German philologist Wilhelm Bleck and his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd. The paintings and engravings, said the bushmen, were made by people "full of supernatural power" – shamans. The shamans went on their journeys after arduous foodless and drinkless trance dances that might last 24 hours. The small blood vessels inside the shamans' noses would often become fragile from the dehydration and burst – hence the nose bleeds shown in the images. The therianthropes depicted the shamans just as they transformed into the animal forms necessary for travel in the spirit-world, and many of the other images were what they had seen when they were there. The rock art images were illustrated travel books.

The geometric patterns are the ubiquitous entoptic phenomena associated with many altered states of consciousness. They are the phenomena that you see when you enter, with the help of entheogens or otherwise, an altered state of consciousness. There is a fair chance that we will all see them when we are dying. Such altered states are commonly associated, too, with a feeling that the normal boundaries of the body have been changed – hence the elongated figures. If neuroscientist Andrew Newberg (**FT286:44**) had been able to put one of the San shamans into his SPECT (Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography) scanner during a spirit voyage, he would doubtless have found alteration in parietal lobe activity similar to that seen in the meditators and nuns he studied. The animals on ropes were 'rain

ONDERWIJSGEK/CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Shamanic journeys may have been facilitated by hallucinogens like the fly agaric mushrom.



ABOVE: Is the image of the Christian martyr Saint Sebastian pierced with arrows an echo of the 'pierced shaman' motif found in many world religions?

animals' being captured by the shaman and dragged back to this world. When they were cut or milked, rain would come. The bent-over posture was the position adopted by the shamans in the trance dance, and as ecstatic consummation came, so did an erection.

The pierced figures are similarly illustrations of the shamanic process. Mircea Eliade and Joan Halifax compiled gruesome catalogues of the ordeals endured by shamans – particularly in their initiation. To become a shaman is often no easy matter. In many cultures, the apprentice shaman experiences, in his initiatory trance voyage to the spirit world, torture, death and dismemberment. His shattered body is then rebuilt and reborn into his terrestrial body. He will never be the same again: he now has – because the other world is his new birthplace – a right to be in the abode of the spirits, and an instinctual knowledge of its customs. He has dual citizenship, and can broker deals for his earthbound but spirit-affected clients.

The tortured shaman is everywhere. In the Australian bush, an Aboriginal shaman's sides are cut open, his internal organs removed and a snake implanted in his head. Amongst the Pomo Indians of North America, the initiate endures the 'Ghost Ceremony', in which he is tortured, dies, and rises. Late Maya ceramics and Chinese Shang Dynasty cast bronzes both show how the apprentice gives himself up to the initiating spirit-cat (a jaguar in Central America, a tiger in China). The pose is almost identical in each: the cat's teeth penetrate the skull of the screaming shaman. An Inuit shaman from Arctic Canada drives his seal harpoon through his own abdomen.

THE SHAMAN'S SHATTERED BODY IS REBUILT AND REBORN

The first real evidence of human symbolising and religion is – or comes at exactly the same time as – evidence of shamanic journeys. Those shamanic journeys may well have been facilitated by hallucinogenic substances – perhaps the fly agaric mushroom *Amanita muscaria* in Europe. Many of the ways of inducing shamanic trance still used in Africa are arduous. One can't blame shamans for wanting a chemical short-cut. But did the shamanic journeys themselves, or perhaps the hallucinogens used as chemical wings, enable those previously non-symbolising brains? Did they flick some sort of neural switch? Did they allow men to use in a symbolic way the software inside their heads? Travel broadens the mind: did spirit travel transform it?

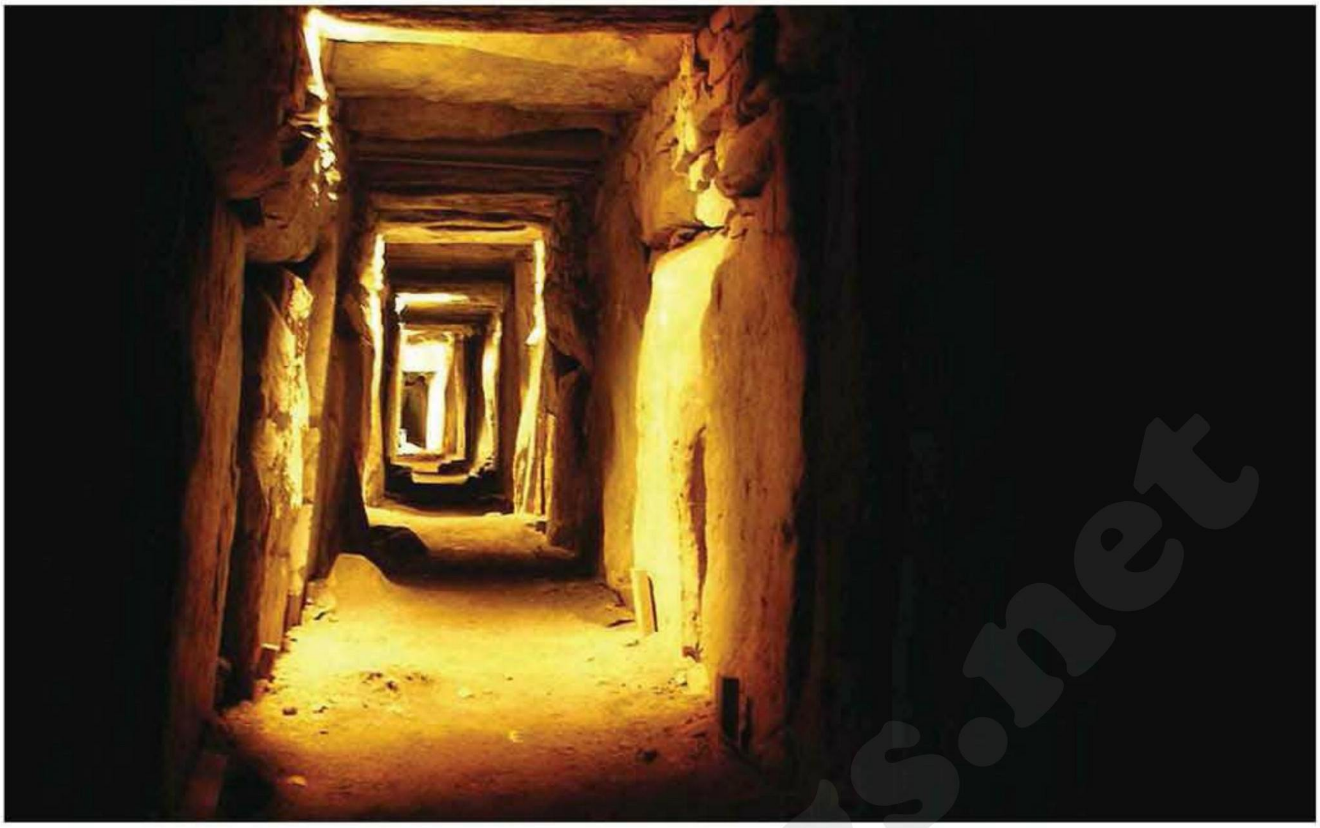
The Lewis-Williams hypothesis is that it did. He emphasises the role of hallucinogens, saying, in effect, that they flung open the doors of symbolic faculty. What clinches the case for him is the close association of sophisticated symbolism (the rock art) and the geometric patterns. Lewis-Williams contends that these patterns are repeated endlessly throughout the prehistorical world, and for the same reason. He sees Neolithic funerary architecture, for instance, as a physical representation of the laminated shamanic Cosmos.

The Knowth passage tomb, for instance, one of the great monuments of Neolithic Ireland, has a corbelled roof above the main chamber, giving the impression of a tunnel spiralling upwards – a deliberate representation, he says, of the tunnel through which the shaman or the cardiac arrest patient passes *en route* to another realm.

Engraved into the wall of the Neolithic flint mine at Harrow Hill in England is the criss-cross pattern seen in Upper Palæolithic cave art and reported by shamans and drug-takers. "[I]f we look below the surface of [Irish and Near Eastern Neolithic architecture]," writes Lewis-Williams, "we can detect similar neurologically generated building blocks."

This is all tremendously exciting stuff. Nobody has fashioned any more promising instruments for probing inside the prehistoric mind. But the fact that we haven't got anything better doesn't mean that Lewis-Williams can tell us everything.

In particular, while the Lewis-Williams mechanism might make us spiritual and superstitious, it doesn't make us religious. It's rather like HADD. It's not at all obvious that it would even tend to generate belief in a god, and, if it did, it wouldn't give him any of the qualities with which humans consistently invest him.



PRZEMYSŁAW SAKRAJDA / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: One of the passages in the Neolithic tomb at Knowth, County Meath, that may form an architectural representation of the shamanic 'tunnel' experience.

THE PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

There's one final line of evidence: consciousness. The nature of consciousness, and indeed the question of whether it's illusory, together constitute the notorious 'hard problem' – hard because it's so far proved impossible even to conceive of the kind of experiment that might begin to probe it: any conceivable experiment would be so contaminated with subjectivity that its conclusions about the very subjectivity that it was seeking to investigate would be worthless.

Consciousness is the conviction that there's an 'I'. We all talk as if there's an 'I' inside our bodies. The 'I' is the one who possesses the body ("that's *my* leg"), and there's a continuity between the 'I' that was in London yesterday and the 'I' that's in Oxford today. Only in some very rare states (notably induced by extraordinary activity and powerful drugs) is the 'I' nudged off its throne. And it looks identical to the 'soul' about which the religions so confidently speak.

The hard problem presents the greatest challenge of all in biology and philosophy. There's no space here to begin to do justice to the arguments. But it will be generally agreed that there's no apparent selective advantage in consciousness. Of course there's an advantage in sociation and co-operation, and hence in Theory of Mind – being able to think oneself into the position of others. But it's not necessary to have a sense of oneself in order to do that. In fact an 'I' might confuse the delicate social calculus to which Theory of Mind contributes.

Have a look at what evolution has done. One of the most striking features is the phenomenon of convergent evolution. Similar selective pressures produce similar solutions. Sharks and dolphins haven't had a common ancestor for a very, very long time, and yet a surfer will worry himself sick if he sees a dolphin's dorsal fin cutting through a wave.

One of the things that evolution seems to be very fond of producing is consciousness. It's not just in humans: it's in higher apes, various types of crows, and no doubt in many other organisms too. The better we get at detecting it, the more of it there seems to be. The Universe is a garden which is extremely good at growing consciousness. The only point of an 'I' is relationship. There's no point in an 'I' unless there are other 'I's around to whom I can give of mine.

That we can imagine an immaterial 'I' – that we can imagine immateriality at all – seems, using the only paradigms of which we are capable of conceiving, impossible if we are merely bundles of neurones. The notion of consciousness/souls makes no Darwinian sense at all. It makes sense, though, if we adopt the God hypothesis.

We've now surveyed three types of evidence relevant to that hypothesis.

First came spiritual experience. It makes no sense for the materialist. It is costly and often dangerous, and serves no purpose. All that the materialist can say about it is that it is a useless by-product of useful neuronal functions. But no one has been able to suggest what that useful function might be. It's not ridiculous to suggest that we might be biologically capable of spiritual experiences because there is some objective spiritual reality to which we are intended to relate. Indeed it might be slightly more ridiculous, on the basis of the evidence we've examined here, to argue against the existence of that spiritual reality.

Then there was the existence and content of religion. Again, no one has been able coherently to suggest why religion (and some of its corollaries, such as altruism), erupted. One would have expected natural selection to have stamped brutally on its seeds. And, yet again, the materialists are left saying that religion is a by-product of some evolutionarily useful phenomenon which they are unable to identify.

And finally there's the mystery of consciousness. Identical comments apply. It seems utterly unlikely that matter should be able to generate the idea of non-matter.

All this points suggestively – though of course not conclusively – to the existence of something out there with the sort of properties that we tend to attribute to God. And, more than that: a god who seems to want to communicate with us. FT

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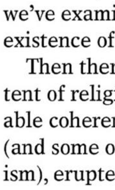

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BRITAIN'S HIGH PRIESTESS

From astral battles with rival magicians to an occult war against Nazi Germany, Dion Fortune never shied away from a fight. **GARY LACHMAN** explores the life and magic of a remarkable woman whose life's work allied modern psychology with esoteric tradition.

On Sunday mornings during the height of the Battle of Britain, several people could be found huddled together in 3 Queensborough Terrace, Bayswater, engaged in an activity that most Londoners wouldn't have recognised as part of the war effort. Imagining themselves part of the "group soul of their race", these otherwise respectable citizens visualised "angelic Presences, red-robed and armed, patrolling the length and breadth of our land". Further meditations had them patrolling mine fields off the coast of Norway and performing astral commando raids on high-ranking Nazis. This "magical" effort against Hitler and Co. continued throughout the war (see **FT185:50**; **267:34–41** for the full story), and though its effect on the dark forces of National Socialism may be doubted, the earnestness of those participating was unquestionable. The fact that during the Blitz not one but two German bombs fell on the headquarters of the Fraternity of Light – the group behind this spiritual resistance movement – might suggest that the Führer recognised their threat and tried to eradicate it. The further fact that those engaged in these ætheric expeditions spoke of astral dogfights and mystical punch-ups might also suggest that there was more behind them than just patriotic wishful thinking.

The leader of this occult Territorial Army was at any rate very familiar with magical battles. In fact, it was through one such row itself that she first became involved in the occult. Having learned early on how to defend herself from psychic attack, and having devoted many years to mastering the mystic arts, by the time Hitler made a bid to annex Britain, she no doubt felt capable of defending not only herself, but also her nation. The name of this remarkable character was Dion Fortune, and she was one of the most brilliant figures of 20th-century esotericism.

DION FORTUNE WAS ONLY TOO FAMILIAR WITH MAGICAL BATTLES

COURTESY THOTH PUBLICATIONS

EARLY VISIONS

This, however, was not her name at birth, or at least not at her physical one. The individual who took the name "Dion Fortune" at her second, "magical", birth was christened Violet Mary Firth, and was born in Llandudno, North Wales, on 6 December 1890. As is true of many esoteric figures, little is known of Violet's early years; as one writer remarks, she "obscured the details of her life and the true nature of her personality behind a cloak of glamour and illusion", something that could also be said of other occult figures, like Madame Blavatsky and Aleister Crowley.[1] Her father came from the prosperous steelmaking Firth family of Sheffield.[2] Arthur Firth didn't follow this line, becoming a solicitor, although by the time of Violet's birth, he was running the Craigside Hydropathic Establishment in Llandudno, having already run

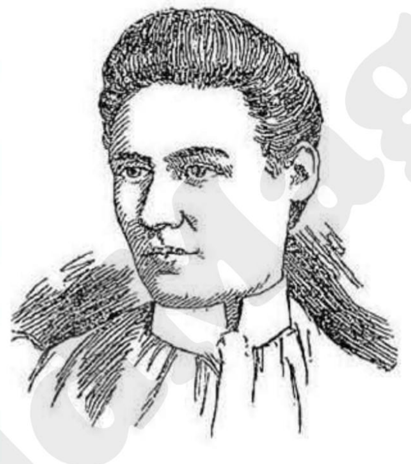
FOX PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Students at Studley College, where Fortune (Violet Firth, as she then was) enrolled at the age of 20. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Fortune in her college uniform. **BELOW:** Lillias Anna Hamilton, the Warden of Studley College; her Svengali-like attempts to control her young charges led Violet to the study of psychology and magic.

a similar spa-hotel in Bath – an apt career, perhaps, for the father of someone for whom the sea would be a central symbol of mystery, magic, and power.

Violet's mother, Sarah, was a Christian Scientist, and in her early years, Violet too, felt the impact of Mary Baker Eddy's ideas.

But there were other, stranger experiences that presaged Violet's life to come. At the age of four, she began to have visions of a past life in Atlantis. She saw, she said, "pictures that formed themselves unbidden in the mind in that interval between the putting out of the nursery light and the oncoming of sleep" – what we would call hypnagogic hallucinations.[3] She speaks of a "sandy foreshore" and a level plain, with great mountains rising sharply in the distance, of a river and strange trees that it wasn't safe to go near, of dangerous beasts in the river and equally dangerous people, of grassy vegetation, an indigo sky and a copper-coloured sun. Were these images of an actual past life, or psychic postcards from some Jungian collective unconscious? Or were they the kind of fantasies an imaginative and lonely little girl might entertain herself with? Whatever the source of these strange visions, they stayed with Violet throughout her life, and led her to believe that her true home wasn't in a sleepy seaside resort, but in some lost world that she could return to only through her imagination. In later years, although she claimed that she wasn't "naturally psychic",[4] Fortune would channel a remarkable work of occult metaphysics, *The Cosmic Doctrine* ("received" in 1923 but not published until 1949), her own attempt at doing what Mme Blavatsky had done in *The Secret Doctrine*: reveal the hidden structure of the Cosmos. Although *The Cosmic Doctrine* remains a difficult work and is generally read by serious devotees only, it suggests that the visions of some other life that haunted the young Violet were not merely pre-school make believe, but an early expression of her strange ability to enter and make herself at home in other worlds.



But although the young Violet had visions of prehistoric Atlantis, and at 14 was writing poems about the sea, her real introduction to the mystic path came in her early 20s and in a drearily mundane context. When Violet turned 20, her parents decided to enrol her in a residential college. The Studley Horticultural and Agricultural College is said to have offered places to "young ladies with slight emotional problems". From the little we know about Violet's teens, we get the impression of an imaginative, withdrawn, somewhat snobbish – "I have a constitutional repulsion for 'crushes'," she wrote, "and give them scant politeness" – highly intelligent and creative young woman who, like many others, had to find a place for herself in the world. Violet would find her path at Studley's, but not in the way she, or anyone else, might have imagined.

The Warden of Studley College was pioneering female doctor Lillias Anna Hamilton, who had travelled in Afghanistan (where she had been court physician to the Emir) and India, where she had learned techniques of mental domination that made her a terror to the students. Violet had been at the school only a short while when the Warden asked her to give false evidence against an employee whom she had illegally sacked. Although Violet was reluctant, Hamilton's insistence and powers of persuasion overcame her scruples – her method was to stare at Violet and simply repeat her commands – and after the interview Violet felt "dazed and exhausted" and slept for 15 hours. Other incidents occurred, with Violet reluctantly complying, until the Warden turned her sights on an elderly woman, seeking control over her financial affairs. Violet informed the woman of the scheme and hastily got her away and into the safekeeping of relatives.

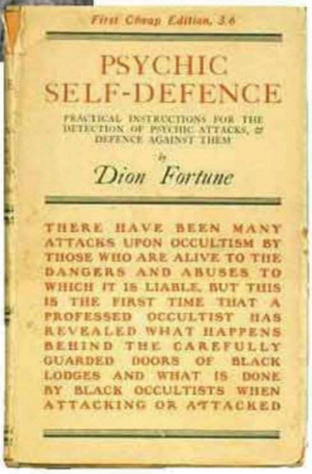
When Violet realised the principal knew of her part in this rescue, she decided to leave the school, before she herself fell victim to her powers. A fellow student, who had felt Hamilton's wrath, advised her to leave without seeing the Warden again: "You will not get away if you don't. I have tried several times and I cannot."[5] Violet was troubled by the advice, but was determined to tell the Warden what she thought of her. When she did, Hamilton agreed to her leaving, but then adopted her Svengali pose and insisted: "You are incompetent and you know it. You have no self-confidence and you have to admit it." She repeated this mantra for the next four hours, with Violet transfixed and unable to break away. She knew that if she agreed with the Warden, her "nerve would be broken" and she would be useless in life. "By the time one realises that something abnormal" is going on, she wrote, one is more or less "glamoured" and "one cannot move or turn away." Eventually, Violet heard a voice suggesting she pretend to accept the Warden's terms, otherwise she would end up like the girl who had warned her. She did, even going down on her knees to ask forgiveness. This satisfied the Warden, who let her go. Violet had entered the room "a strong and healthy girl" and left it "a mental and physical wreck". She stayed that way for three years.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOYA BEANS

Determined to understand what had happened, Violet began to study psychology. By this time, she had moved to London and was taking classes in psychoanalysis at the University of London, and had joined the Medico-Psychological Clinic in Brunswick Square; she may also have worked at the Tavistock Clinic. The Theosophical Society had recently started a club near Brunswick Square, and Violet started visiting, not because she had any real interest in Theosophy, but because they offered cheap meals. As a Freudian, she dismissed Theosophists as cranks, but when, for a lark, she attended a meditation class, something odd happened. She saw a distinct image of a garden with blue flowers right before her eyes – rather like the hypnagogic images of Atlantis she saw as a child. When the instructor remarked that she had been trying to project the mental image of delphiniums, Violet realised that some kind of thought transference had happened. Earlier, she had noticed that some of her patients seemed to "drain" her of energy, and that they even seemed to suck power out of electronic equipment; they acted, she thought, as a kind of 'vampire' – something Freudian theory couldn't explain. She attended further lectures at the Theosophical Society and quickly realised that Freud's ideas were too narrow. Something else was needed, and she soon found it.

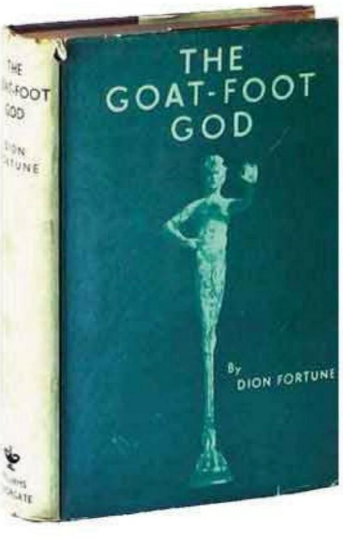
Although Fortune's later work drew on psychoanalysis, producing what some have called a "psychologised occultism", she dropped out of the clinic and, as WWI had begun, joined the Land Army. Her time at Studley served her in good stead, and she was put to work for the Food Production Department of the Ministry of Agriculture. Here she discovered a means of making milk from soybeans and even wrote a book about it, *The Soya Bean* (1925), but failed to capitalise on a discovery which could have made her rich. Her job for the Land Army required long hours of observing bacteria, and in the quiet stretches, her vision turned inward. Again, something strange happened: her 'astral sight' had opened and the experience was disturbing. At the Theosophical Club, she read Annie Besant's *The Ancient Wisdom*. Much as Besant, a Fabian Socialist, had been converted after meeting Mme Blavatsky, Fortune was suddenly convinced of the reality of the 'Masters', superhuman beings who guided humanity in its evolution. For the next 10 days, she entered a weird, 'astral' dimension, the experience culminating in a visitation by Jesus. Other Masters appeared – Melchizedek, 'Lord of Flame and Mind', Thomas Erskine, a Lord Chancellor in Dr Johnson's' time, Sir Thomas More – and in one vision she was accepted by them as a student.

ABOVE AND RIGHT: Moina Mathers, whose astral battles with Fortune inspired the latter's 1930 book *Psychic Self-Defence*. **BELOW AND FACING PAGE:** Fortune wrote a number of esoterically themed novels, including *The Demon Lover* (1927) and *The Goat-Foot God* (1936).


First Cheap Edition, 3.6
PSYCHIC SELF-DEFENCE
PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DETECTION OF PSYCHIC ATTACKS, & DEFENCE AGAINST THEM
by
Dion Fortune

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY ATTACKS UPON OCCULTISM BY THOSE WHO ARE ALIVE TO THE DANGERS AND ABUSES TO WHICH IT IS LIABLE. BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT A PROFESSED OCCULTIST HAS REVEALED WHAT HAPPENS BEHIND THE CAREFULLY GUARDED DOORS OF BLACK LODGES AND WHAT IS DONE BY BLACK OCCULTISTS WHEN ATTACKING OR ATTACKED

With the end of the war, Violet left the Land Army. It was around this time that she met the Irish Freemason and occultist Theodore William Moriarty, the model for her "psychic detective" in *The Secrets of Dr Tavener* (1926), her collection of occult short stories. Violet joined the group of students, mostly women, who belonged to Moriarty's Science, Arts, and Crafts Society, and in the introduction to the Dr Tavener stories, she writes that he was "the greatest mind I ever met", and that she owed " the greatest debt of my life" to him. "Without 'Dr Tavener'," she writes, "there would have been no Dion Fortune." [6] Her *Cosmic Doctrine*, mentioned earlier, is based on Moriarty's rare book *Aphorisms of Creation and Cosmic Principles* (1923). Moriarty himself died of angina pectoris under mysterious circumstances in a hotel in King's Lynn in August 1923, and Fortune was supposed to have received the messages from the inner planes that make up her book not long after his death. Some have suggested that Fortune simply took Moriarity's work and, after his death, "improved" on it. Whatever the truth, *The Cosmic Doctrine* remains a controversial work in several ways. The occult historian Francis King thought it had much value, while the occult artist and writer Ithell Colquhoun thought it was rubbish.



ASTRAL BATTLES

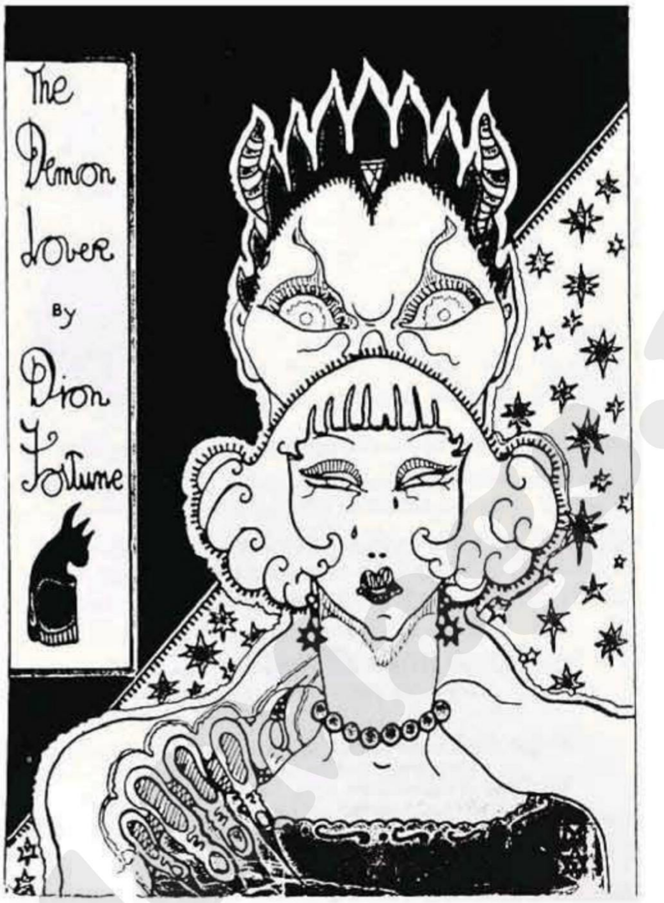
Strangely enough, *The Cosmic Doctrine* got Violet into trouble in her next magical group. While still studying with Moriarity, Violet renewed an old friendship with Maiya Curtis-Webb (later Maiya Tranchell-Hayes), a friend of the family. Maiya, like Moriarty, was an occultist, and she introduced Violet to the occult novelist JW Brodie-Innes, who was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn's Amen-Ra Temple. The original Golden Dawn numbered WB Yeats and Crowley as members, but by this time had split into several competing groups. In 1919, Violet Firth was initiated into the Golden Dawn, taking "*Deo, non Fortune*" (God, not luck) as her magical motto; it was, as it happened, the Firth family motto as well. This soon morphed into Dion Fortune.

Another Golden Dawn temple was run by Moina Mathers, widow of MacGregor Mathers, one of the original group's leaders. Although at first friendly to Dion, even agreeing with her idea to start a more public occult group to attract more members (what would become the Fraternity of the Inner Light), Moina soon developed a more critical attitude. What troubled her were the articles Dion had published in the *Occult Review*, which later became her book *Sane Occultism* (1929; republished 2001 as *What is Occultism?*). Arguing that "an immense mass of verbiage has gathered around the Sacred Science since Mme Blavatsky drew back the curtain of the Sanctuary", and asking why occultism "has produced such a crop of charlatans and few, if any, intellects of the first water", Fortune's articles didn't win her many friends, and among those she angered was Moina Mathers. [7] Mathers was also angry that in her early work *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage* (1924), a book that dealt – however mutely – with the question of sex and the occult, Fortune had revealed certain magical secrets that she had no right to communicate. Fortune sidestepped this when she argued that as she had yet to be initiated into the grade that introduced these secrets, she couldn't very well reveal them. But the real reason behind the tension was that Dion's energy, drive, and superior attitude rubbed many people up the wrong way, and Moina, an older woman, felt threatened by them. It also can't have helped that Fortune had written that the Golden Dawn was being led by "widows and grey-bearded ancients".[8] When Moina saw a rough draft of Fortune's *Cosmic Doctrine*, she declared that it was inconsistent with Golden Dawn teaching, and added the trenchant criticism that "certain symbols had not appeared in her aura". Moina gave Fortune an ultimatum: either forget her 'revelations' and get back in line, or leave. Fortune left.

In *Psychic Self-Defense* (1930), Fortune describes an astral battle between herself and Moina Mathers; this time, however, she was no longer a "shy, vulnerable adolescent", but a "strong, magnetic leader".[9] After writing of the "abuses prevalent in occult fraternities", Fortune received a letter warning her of what would happen if she continued her exposé. Believing her work to be inspired by the Masters, Dion stuck to her guns. The result was a prolonged attack that only ended with an astral catfight between her and Moina.

Demon faces appeared, and Fortune and those around her suffered a feline infestation: the headquarters of her Fraternity of Inner Light and its neighbours were overrun by mobs of black cats. The place was "filled with the horrible stench of the brutes", and at their day-job offices, members of the group found "the same penetrating reek of the tom-cat". Astral moggies appeared too, and one morning after breakfast, Fortune was confronted by a "gigantic tabby… twice the size of a tiger". The invasion ended after Fortune performed an exorcism, but she was soon grappling with her enemy anew. During an essential astral journey, Fortune encountered Moina, dressed in the robes of her grade. She refused Fortune right of way, and a battle ensued. Moina won the first round, throwing Dion back into her body, which somersaulted over her followers who had gathered in a vigil. Remembering her lesson with the Warden, Fortune got back on the astral plane, and this time won the tussle. But that night she discovered that her back was covered with the scratches of a "gigantic cat". Later, Fortune also believed that Moina was responsible for the death of her friend Netta Fornario, an artist and occultist who was found dead on Iona, her nude body also covered in scratches, lying in a ritual position on a cross cut into the turf (**FT159:51**). Moina, however, had been dead herself for 18 months by the time Fornario, who seems to have been a depressed character, apparently committed suicide. Fortune would no doubt have argued that committing murder from the afterlife would not have been beyond the powers or vindictiveness of her hermetic nemesis…

DION'S ATTITUDE RUBBED MANY PEOPLE UP THE WRONG WAY



COURTESY THOTH PUBLICATIONS

MYSTICAL NATIONALISM

The battle with Moina Mathers seemed to mark a new beginning for Fortune. Along with the house in Bayswater, she set up occult camp in Glastonbury, in a spot near the Chalice Well and the Tor, in a house which was later bought by the writer Geoffrey Ashe. She had already met and worked with Bligh Bond, who had excavated the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey, supposedly with the help of the spirit of one of its deceased monks (see **FT143:40–44; 249:50–54**), and together they contacted inner entities she called the "Watchers of Avalon". Glastonbury became a symbol of the "mystical nationalism" that fuelled her later anti-Nazi activities, and expressed her aim to resuscitate the West's own esoteric tradition, as opposed to Theosophy's popular Eastern variants; it's no surprise that she left the Theosophical Society in 1927. Fortune thought much about race – too much, no doubt, for our tastes – but she believed that the Western soul was unsuited for Eastern esoteric disciplines, and she wanted to provide access to our own "home grown" spiritual traditions. In the decade that followed, she produced an impressive body of work, which included at least two classics. One is *The Mystical Qabalah* (1935), to my mind the most readable and straightforward exposition of the West's fundamental esoteric philosophy, in which she draws on the work of both MacGregor Mathers and Crowley. The other is perhaps her finest work in occult fiction, *The Sea Priestess* (1938), in which a humdrum estate agent's life is transformed by an affair with a modern-day priestess of Isis. At the time, Fortune had to self-publish it because witchcraft laws were still on the books in England and the novel was considered too controversial by mainstream publishers. Many have come to an appreciation of the Western inner path through reading Fortune's fiction, and in novels like *The Demon Lover* (1927), *The Winged Bull* (1935), *The Goat-Foot God* (1936), and *Moon Magic* (1956) – her last book, whose final chapters were alleged to have been channelled – Fortune communicates in clear and evocative prose the essence of her spiritual vision.

The time also marked a change in her personal life. In 1927, she married Thomas Penry Evans, a Welsh physician, who had his own mystical path; Fortune called him "Merl", after Merlin. Although they shared magical pursuits, the two did not seem well matched. Fortune was a large, "mannish", "Viking-like" woman, and like so many occultists (Mme Blavatsky, Crowley, Gurdjieff), she put on weight in her later years. Evans was a small, dark Celt. Sex was never a major part of the union, nor even a minor one; again, like Mme Blavatsky, Fortune seemed to disdain it, although it runs as a magical current through her novels (and the discerning reader can chart the fortunes of her marriage in them). Fortune was the dominant and older partner, and accounts are that she bossed Thomas constantly; the occultists Kenneth Grant and Israel Regardie both report that she henpecked him "unmercifully". Fortune seems to have overcompensated for her treatment at the Studley Agricultural College; according to Grant, she grew "very partial to the idea of power" and "did not scruple to tell her followers how they should arrange their private lives".[10] In 1939, Evans left her for a

ROBERT B OSTEN / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE LEFT: Dion Fortune photographed around 1930. **ABOVE RIGHT:** She died, aged 55, in 1946 and was buried in Glastonbury.

younger woman. The divorce was amicable.

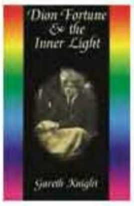
In later years, Fortune's work increasingly focused on trance mediumship and making contact with the Masters on the inner planes. In the early 1930s, she leased a house near Belgrave Square called The Belfry, where she performed the rites of Isis that would find fictional expression in *Moon Magic.* Her following in the Fraternity grew and would eventually include later magical authorities such as WE Butler, WG Gray, and Gareth Knight.

FINAL YEARS

When WWII broke out, she turned her powers toward protecting the Sceptred Isle whose spiritual traditions she had spent decades promulgating, and from Bayswater, Glastonbury, and other points in besieged Britain, she and her students radiated psychic energies, hoping to keep the dark forces at bay (see **FT267:34–41**). Whether it was this effort, or the work of a black magician in Hitler's inner circle who, she believed, directed baleful energies at her, the war years saw her health decline. Many who knew her in her last years said she was a "burnt out shell". One of these was the late Kenneth Grant, who said that when he met her in 1945, she was "close to death and had lost much of her physical force and vigour".[11] Grant believed Fortune was "the magickal Shakti of the New Age", linking her to Crowley's vision of a "new æon", and he describes some late meetings between Fortune and Crowley, a magician who in her early years Fortune steered clear of. Apparently they corresponded, and Grant recalled a "stack of Crowley/Fortune letters" that, sadly, met an unfortunate fate. After Crowley's death in 1947, the letters were sent to Karl Germer, the then head of Crowley's Ordo Templi Orientis. Germer later moved to California, and made the mistake of living near some of Charles Manson's "Family". Some "Family" members burgled his home, and, among other items, took Crowley's letters. These were then lost in a fire started at the "Family" home by a disgruntled junior member. Whatever the truth of this tale, my suspicion is that, if the letters existed, there was probably no great *esoteric* loss in their destruction: meaning that Crowley's letters are generally about himself, and his missives to Fortune would probably be of the same stamp. For researchers and biographers, of course, it's a different story.

Towards the end, Fortune visited a Jungian analyst; she felt she was moving toward some great crisis in her life and needed guidance. She was obese, ill kempt, alone, and surrounded by students of dubious quality – a not uncommon fate for esoteric teachers. The analyst found much darkness in her dreams. She contracted blood poisoning from a badly extracted tooth, and it is unclear if it was this, or the leukæmia she was diagnosed with, that killed her. On 8 January 1946, Dion Fortune passed through the 'gates of death', as one of her posthumously published books was entitled. She was 55, and one of the last great occultists from the golden age of modern esotericism. Her influence continues today in various forms, inspiring Wicca, "mystical feminism" and other movements (Marion Zimmer Bradley's bestseller *The Mists of Avalon* owes much, it is said, to Fortune), and her Fraternity – now Society – of Light carries on.

If she started out wondering why occultism had produced few "intellects of the first water", a look at her career suggests that, in at least one instance, it had. FT



Thank you to Atlantis Bookshop and Tom Clarke at Thoth Publications for letting us reprint some of the images found in their book, *Dion Fortune and the Inner Light* by Gareth Knight, available to order at www.thoth.co.uk.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

GARY LACHMAN is a frequent *FT* contributor and a writer on popular culture, philosophy and occult subjects. Among his recent books are works on Swedenborg, 'Hermes Trismegistus', Jung, Ouspensky, and Rudolf Steiner. His biography of Madame Blavatsky is due out later this year.

NOTES

1 Janine Chapman: *Quest for Dion Fortune*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach, Maine, 1993, p.xvii.

2 Because of her family connections – and perhaps also because of her *nom de guerre* – there was a perpetual myth about Dion Fortune's wealth; at her death in 1946, however, she left a handsome, but not spectacular, legacy.

3 Quoted in Alan Richardson: *Priestess: The Life and Magic of Dion Fortune*, Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, 1987, p31.

4 Dion Fortune: *Psychic Self-Defence*, p69 – free ebook at http://bit.ly/hVbPDZ (occult-underground.com).

5 *Ibid*, p5.

6 Dion Fortune: *The Secrets of Dr Tavener*, p.iii – free ebook at http://bit.ly/hVbPDZ (occult-underground.com).

7 Dion Fortune: *What is Occultism?*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach, Maine, 2001, pp7, 15.

8 Dion Fortune: *Applied Magic*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach, Maine, 2000, p64.

9 Chapman, *op. cit.* p.xvii.

10 Kenneth Grant, quoted in Chapman, p41.

11 *Ibid*.

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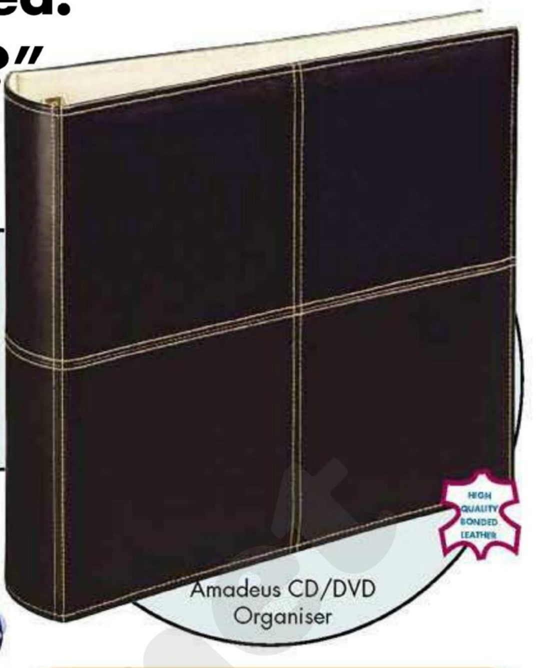

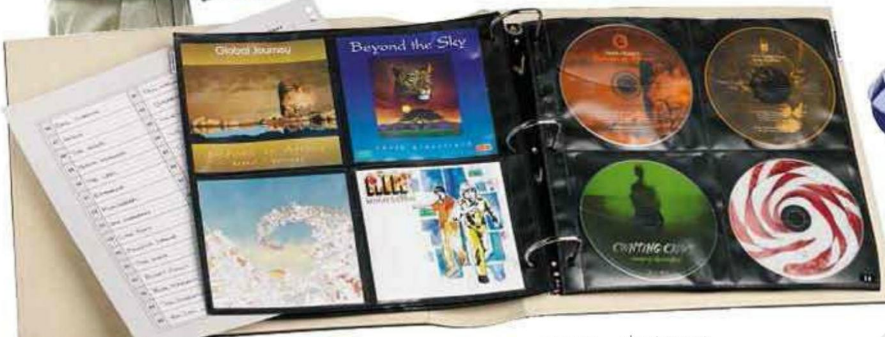

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The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice

No 44: UFO CRASH RETRIEVALS : PART 2

Crashed flying saucers became something of a pariah subject for ufologists following John P Cahn's devastating exposure[1] in 1956 of the way Frank Scully's book *Behind the Flying Saucers* had been based on the testimony of two professional conmen. Then, eventually, in 1977 Doubleday published Leonard H Stringfield's *Situation Red: The UFO Siege*, in which he made "light mention" of the subject. Following that book, a number of people claiming to be first-hand witnesses of 'UFO' crashes and retrievals and their humanoid occupants made contact with Stringfield to tell their stories. Stringfield felt confident enough in his material to present it to the Mutual UFO Network's Symposium held in Dayton, Ohio, in April 1978.

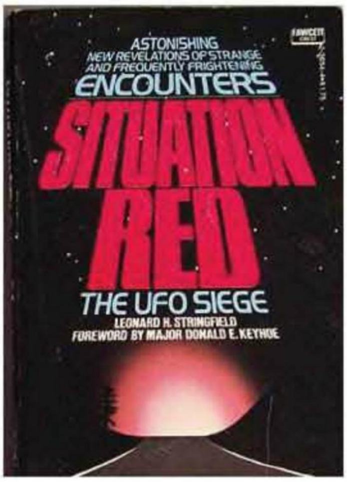
CRASH AND BURN: Leonard H Stringfield wrote of downed saucers after they had been unfashionable for some years.

Status Report I: Retrievals of the Third Kind, as Stringfield titled his presentation, included carefully phrased caveats as to the reliability of its material, but was essentially revisionist: "So completely was Scully's retrieval story put down that some researchers today wonder, in retrospect, if the book and/or its exposure were contrived [as misinformation to keep the public and media away from the facts]. But despite denials and the suspicions of research [Stringfield's habitual shorthand for ufologists], the crash and retrievals stories persisted… I am not in a providential position to pass a positive or final judgement on the retrieval stories or on my informants… However, let me quote an old adage, 'Wherever there is smoke, there is fire.' From my position, I can certainly see a helluva lot of smoke!"

Much of that smoke seems to have got into Stringfield's eyes. Most of his informants proffered not first-hand testimony but stories they'd heard from other people: hearsay from 'inside' military sources, an uncle of a (since disgraced) UFO researcher, someone's brother, the neighbour of someone's father and stepmother… and so on – foaftales, in other words. And a remarkable number of the friends of a friend in question clammed up when approached for in-person interviews, citing oaths of secrecy and the like, or were mysteriously un-trackdown-able. Stringfield clearly didn't recognise this or any other pattern in his findings,[2] and his attachment to the idea that officialdom might be so bothered by the preoccupations of UFO buffs as to *produce a book in order to debunk them,* seems at best somewhat romantic. More cynical minds might see the perception of such a plot as one more instance of ufology's self-absorption and pathological self-importance, but in kindness we should recall that its preoccupation with 'cover-up' and disinformation/misinformation was newly fashionable at the time Stringfield launched his crash-retrieval research.[3]

NOW YOU SEE THEM, NOW YOU DON'T

Status Report II, published in 1980, was largely a rehash and expansion of his earlier paper, although it went into enticing detail of contacts (as usual through intermediaries) with a "CIA informant" and a couple of alleged doctors who purportedly regularly performed autopsies on recovered aliens, all of whom seemed anatomically distinct from one another in rather crucial ways. One motif that crops up in this *Report* concerns the 'military alien movie'. Ageing students of ufology may recall a byzantine *imbroglio*, featuring the infamous Richard Doty, into which TV producer Linda Moulton Howe was drawn in the mid-1980s concerning supposedly genuine military film of landed saucers and dead aliens (and one live one).[4] Stringfield may be responsible – we stand ready to be corrected – for introducing this cinematic legend into UFO lore. The basic version is that servicemen are, for no obvious or stated reason, shown film of crashed saucers and dead aliens, and all are agreed (as if they would know) that these seem too authentic to be the work of Hollywood special-effects experts; and in due course during their military careers meet someone else who has also seen the film. After the screening, viewers are variously told the film is a hoax and to forget – or to keep silent – about it no matter what. Without too much hard work, one can work out quite legitimate reasons for showing selected personnel a fabrication of this kind. With even less work, forteans may be reminded of the famous 'Thunderbird photo' that we've all seen but can't quite remember where or when.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ENCOUNTERS
SITUATION RED
THE UFO SIEGE
LEONARD H. STRINGFIELD
FOREWORD BY MAJOR DONALD E. KEYHOE
FAWCETT

CRIMSON TIDE: Stringfield's book revived public interest in the possibility of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind".

It wasn't really until his third *Status Report* of 1982 that Stringfield really got into his stride, despite having to admit that his CIA and medical sources had become "mysteriously unreachable by any means". But other informants emerged to maintain the flow of tales. In the best tradition, he accepts a third party's boilerplate assurance that one witness is "a relatively unsophisticated and uneducated man" who "does not have sufficient imagination to make up this story". But when corroborating evidence fails to turn up and Stringfield calls him, he finds the man's phone has been disconnected. We are left to infer what we will. Perhaps the man had simply changed his number. For some reason, it didn't occur to Stringfield that hoaxers get bored, or run out of ideas, and in any case generally like to avoid embarrassment.

Some cases echo motifs long familiar to folklorists: the soldier who peeps into a forbidden place to see a flying saucer parked within, for instance. Others are either the seeds of motifs that crop up in later, conspiracy-based saucer legends, or – no less likely – show how images and ideas were *already* drifting about in oral lore, perhaps to be captured in print by Stringfield for the first time. We hear of underground bases (though not containing captured aliens); short aliens with large fanged teeth and "short, lush black hair" and "heavy eyebrows", but also of beardless aliens 7ft 3in (2.2m) tall with long blond hair. A "professor [name witheld]" apparently of Chicago University maintains that alien bodies were examined there in 1948 and 1952, but "the only people my graduate students could locate… said [the] bodies [were] thought to have been the product of Nazi cloning and genetic experiments and recovered from the ruins of Nazi laboratories". Genetic experiments are allegedly carried out on aliens, but the promised X-rays, medical documentation, *etc.*, fails to materialise, and no more is heard from the 'witness'. By this time, of course, Charles Berlitz *et al.* had made the Roswell incident a focal point of ufology; which may well account for Stringfield's sudden flush of fresh accounts in 1981. But it's equally intriguing to see so many themes that later attached themselves to that story appearing so soon.

ACORN: A monument to the Kecksberg object, said to be have been taken by the US military.

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Stringfield continued in his amiable, credulous way to collect tales of crashed saucers, publishing his seventh and final *Status Report*, aptly entitled *Search for Proof in a Hall of Mirrors*, in 1994. Among other things, this contained a fairly hefty section on the Kecksburg, Pennsylvania, incident of 1965 (on which more below), which Stringfield saw no reason to question. By now, the aliens described tend to conform to the 'Gray' template established by abduction researchers by the late 1980s. Curiously, one group, whose craft crashed at a USAAF base "in a state 'north of Georgia'" [*sic*] largely conformed to the stereotype but had perfect, wide, short teeth. Teeth, some of them perfect, feature in other cases in *Status Report VII*. By this time, Stringfield had apparently forgotten that the aliens described by Frank Scully – and by Messrs Newton and GeBauer in countless talks across the US South West in the late 1940s and early 1950s – had perfect teeth. What goes around, comes around.

WELL-BLAZED WILDERNESS TRAIL

If, as we pointed out in Part One of this entry, the Roswell incident contained a number of motifs already established in the literature of crashed anomalous craft, it introduced others. Notable among them were (1) the remote location of the crash, (2a) a military quarantine of the site that often involved (2b) civilians being threatened by servicemen, (3) the speedy removal of *all* traces of debris, (4) the public being fed a not entirely convincing cover story, and (5) the noticeable tendency of the long-suffering US Air Force to be involved, even in distant countries: in particular the USAF appears to have a global monopoly on warehousing UFO debris and dead aliens. As the Roswell saga unfolded over the years, a further pattern emerged: fresh witnesses – some of them former servicemen and women sworn to silence at the time – came forward with ever-more elaborate details after each new set of 'revelations', elaborately faked documents were produced in evidence, and on occasion bits of allegedly 'original' wreckage are found and then *either* subjected to inconclusive tests *or* disappear *en route* to or from laboratories.[5] It might be added that UFO crashes tend to be investigated in detail only many years after they reportedly occur and, the more distant in time the crash becomes, the more elaborate the accounts become. There is also a cottage industry devoted to claims that various actually well-documented technological advances, from the transistor onward, have been back-engineered from bits of crashed alien craft, although these are rarely identified with specific crashes.

Not all UFO crash stories contain all these elements, any more than all abduction accounts contain all the elements identified in the full-blown sequence identified by Thomas Bullard in 1987 (and since revised by Dennis Stacy and elaborated further by later abductologists' claims).[6] But a template has been established. To underscore the point, we offer a swift survey of the cases, besides Roswell, that we mentioned at the opening of this entry: Kecksburg, Pennsylvania, USA, 1965; Berwyn Mountain, Wales, 1974; and Rendlesham Forest, England, 1980.

The Kecksburg 'UFO' (**FT171:18**) was actually a spectacular meteorite fireball seen over the town at about 4:45pm on 9 December 1965. In the time-honoured fashion of meteorites, it appeared to be much closer than it was, and townspeople, believing it was an aircraft in distress, thought it had landed with a bang in some nearby woods. In fact, the meteor had generated a sonic boom and landed in Lake Erie. The fireball was seen from many other places in the region (in 17 different locations, witnesses believed it had crashed nearby) and its smoke trail was photographed, which allowed its trajectory to be calculated accurately. Reports of a burning aircraft reached a local radio station, which alerted State troopers; the news report inspired the USAF's Project Blue Book to ask 662 Radar Squadron at the nearest Air Force base, at Oakdale, PA, to investigate: they despatched three men to Kecksburg. Two searches were made in the woods, one that night and another the following morning, and nothing was found.

Local newspapers the following day reported that the fireball was a meteor.

Read about the Kecksburg incident today, however, and you will be told that more than 100 armed soldiers descended on the area, cordoned it off and declared martial law, while citizens were threatened with loaded weapons, and an "acorn"-shaped object was hauled out of the woods on a military low-loader, presumably to join the hundreds of other conked-out flying saucers jealously hoarded by the US military. People saw hieroglyphic writing on the object, even though it was dark and the thing was covered in a tarpaulin. A precise history has been written of how this story developed, naming which ufologists made which errors and perpetuated them, and which citizens have told what tall stories, over the years.[7] Here, we'll note two salient facts: first, the US services' standard M123 low-loader wasn't authorised to travel on public highways and anyway would not have been able to negotiate the terrain where the 'saucer' 'crashed'. Second, 'serious ufologists' didn't start investigating the case until about 1979, when it first piqued Leonard Stringfield's interest. Most of the digging started in the mid 1980s, two decades after the event. The Kecksburg 'UFO crash' story is hokum, but its absence from official records is – of course – proof that the truth has been covered up.

PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB THE SHEEP

The Welsh Berwyn Mountain 'crash' likewise lay unnoticed for the best part of 20 years until English ufologist Margaret Fry moved into the area and began nosing about. Ms Fry was already on the record as stating that a UFO once landed in her garden. It's generally been overlooked in examining this case that North Waleans are not as a rule that keen on English incomers: some of what she was told by locals may well have been concocted for merriment's sake, as well as to get her off their backs. But by the mid 1990s she and the late Tony Dodd had joined various dots in various ways to make a coherent story of a crashed UFO, police and military cordons, lamplit nocturnal searches, Men In Black making pointed enquiries, and even aliens being transported to the Ministry of Defence's CBW research station at Porton Down. One of the few downed-saucer motifs missing from the tale was hieroglyphs.

Sedulous research by Andy Roberts[8] has stitched up almost every one of the claims for an anomalous event (see **FT252:30–35**). Poachers out lamping on the mountain gave the impression of both 'mystery lights' *and* a concerted search, for instance, but the main stimulus for the idea of a UFO crash was an odd coincidence of a series of bolide meteors and a mild earthquake. The area is used by half NATO's air forces for low-flying and night exercises: a natural popular conclusion at the time was that there'd been an aircraft crash. There hadn't (local police and an RAF mountain rescue team did investigate), and the MIB later reported were no more sinister creatures than geologists trying to get a handle on the seismic event from first-hand witnesses. But, as Roberts remarked, "[I]n 1974 UFO crash retrievals were barely mentioned in UFO literature, especially in the UK, and there was no immediate template for the event in the Berwyns to fit into." Thus the case lay dormant until it could be made to conform to a set of established ideas. The ufological account of 'military cordons' is based on misrepresenting the account of one (now rather cross) witness, plus very probable confusion, so long after the key event, with two crashes of sensitive military aircraft in 1971/2 and 1982. And so on. Once again, we have a non-story, embellished by at least one (anonymous) fantasist and retold by pattern-seeking 'researchers' to become a ufological 'classic'.

The Rendlesham Forest incident (see **FT204:32–39**) is distinct from the general pattern of crash-retrieval cases insofar as there was neither a crash nor a retrieval. The case is persistently referred to as "Britain's Roswell", however. This may be more an indication of the fuzziness of ufological thinking than anything else, but the internal logic of the canonical version of events does bear some resemblance to stereotypical crashed-saucer cases. Thirty-odd years on from the event itself, it would now take a quite fat, thick, square book to sort even half-reliable from half-crazed testimony – which is to say, not all those who claim to have been there and witnessed strange things agree with one another – let alone to lay out the arguments in favour of a rational explanation.[9]

We would note though that, like its New Mexican counterpart and certain more typical crashed-saucer legends, 'Rendlesham' has become *two* stories. First, there is the one that does its best to cover the bases of what actually happened without straying too far into speculation; and second, there is now a set of ufologically entrenched accounts that have developed and mutated in ever more fantastic ways over the years. The latter most probably represent not so much 'the truth' but a cluster of *subjective* and largely symbolic truths whose substance has less to do with incompetent alien pilots and their ramshackle craft than with our puzzling contemporary world, and the hazards of navigating it.[10]

Lying over or under all that, there is the standing sceptical demand for physical evidence of UFOs, and ufologists' deep-rooted desire to provide just such a Holy Grail to justify their convictions. There is a whole literature on the latter, but it's less fortean than religious in scope. Time to retreat to the desert for some roasted locusts and revelation?

NOTES

[1] PDFs of Cahn's articles in *True* magazine can be downloaded from http://bit.ly/wPCgw0 and http://bit.ly/yhKalq (both physics.smu.edu). There is a useful summary of the background to Scully's book and its somewhat bizarre Hollywood connections in Andy Roberts: "Saucerful of Secrets", in Hilary Evans and John Spencer (ed.): *UFOs 1947–1987*, Fortean Tomes, 1987, pp156–159.

[2] Probably the best-known of urban-legend/foaftale scholars, Jan Harold Brunvand, classified crashed-saucer stories ("The Landed Martians") as one of a subset of "secret-truth" stories under the general heading of Government Legends, as long ago as 1984: see *The Choking Doberman and other new urban legends*, Penguin 1984, p198.

[3] If Scully *had* come under the scrutiny of the organs of the state, it would surely have been for his left-wing politics. But not even the notoriously obsessional FBI of the 1950s took more than a passing interest in him. For more on this and Scully in general, see http://bit.ly/hWSbcE (openminds.tv) and the profile at http://bit.ly/xePelg (redstarfilms.blogspot.com). Since the 1980s, ufology has edged ever closer to becoming a branch of mainstream conspiracy theory, and Stringfield's paranoid logic has become a leitmotif in the field. In 1995, it was appropriately adduced by Gordon Creighton in introducing the story of a 1950s Venezuelan UFO crash: "One of the main purposes behind the recent hullabaloo about an alleged documentary film of the autopsy of 'Roswell corpses' may have been to produce sufficient fresh clouds of smoke and to delete all memory of the name and outstanding work of the late Leonard Stringfield..." (*FSR* 99 [Vol 44:3], p10).

[4] See Peter Brookesmith: *UFO: The Government Files*, Brown Books, 1996, p98; and for the latest detailed account of this episode, see Mark Pilkington: *Mirage Men*, Constable, 2010, pp205–8.

[5] Cf: John Harney: "UFO Crash Retrievals: A Developing Myth", *Magonia* 58, Jan 1997, and Gareth Medway: "UFO Crashes: An Emergent Pattern", *Magonia Supplement* 36, June 2001. Aerospace historian and archæologist Peter W Merlin has investigated more than 100 crash sites, some of highly classified aircraft, and has in no case found a 'perfect' collection of debris: see http://bit.ly/zn9ofH (dreamlandresort.com) for more details.

[6] TE Bullard: *The Measure of a Mystery*, FUFOR 1987 (two volumes); Dennis Stacy: "Abductions and Abortions", *Bulletin of Anomalous Experience* Vol 3:5, 1992.

[7] See the comprehensive demolition of the case in SUNLite Vol 3:6 (Nov–Dec 2011), online at http://bit.ly/Au0Sz9 (home.comcast.net), especially Robert Young: "The Investigation of the Kecksburg UFO Crash", pp27–31.

[8] See Andy Roberts: "Fire on the Mountain" in D Clarke, J Randles & A Roberts: *The UFOs That Never Were*, London House 2000, pp144–163; and *UFO Down: the Berwyn Mountain UFO Crash*, CFZ Press, 2010.

[9] For the most recent (although not complete) canonical version of 'Rendlesham', see J Penniston and C Halt: "The Extraordinary Incident at Rendlesham Forest" in L Kean: *UFOs: Generals, Pilots and Government Officials Go On the Record*, Harmony 2010, pp179–188; for an opposing view, see http://bit.ly/wmw0J (ianridpath.com), which includes much original documentation and details of claims made by proponents.

[10] "Legend addresses real psychological problems associated with the geographic and social environments, acting as a reflection of commonly felt pressures. However, it is not only fears which are addressed but also desires. Much of folk narrative is the human fantasy engaging in wishful thinking. Legend, thus, acts as a symbolic representation of collective experiences and beliefs, expressing fears and desires associated with the common environmental and social factors affecting both the active and passive tradition bearers." – Timothy R Tangherlini: "'It Happened Not Too Far from Here...': A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization", *Western Folklore*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Oct 1990), p381.

The Hierophant's Apprentice is most grateful to Clas Svan and Anders Liljegren of Arkivet för UFO-forskning, Sweden, and to Dr David Clarke, for supplying vital research material for this entry.

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forum

Sticky wickets

MARTYN P JACKSON reflects on cricket's dark secret – an apparently unusually high suicide rate among players.

MARTYN P JACKSON contributed to the cricket magazines *Sticky Wicket* and *Johnny Miller 96 Not Out* in the 1990s. He is a critic and reviewer for the rock website rushonrock.com.

At 9.15 on the evening of Saturday 12 November 2011, Peter Roebuck, a former Somerset county cricketer and captain, committed suicide by jumping from a hotel window in Cape Town. He had been interviewed by police over an alleged sexual assault following a complaint from a 28-year-old man. His death was the latest in a long line of cricket suicides that stretch back to the Victorian era.

In 2001, Roebuck had received a four month suspended jail sentence at Taunton crown court after admitting common assault charges against three 19-year-old South Africans he was coaching. Shortly afterwards, he left Britain to become an Australian resident and developed a career as a forthright and respected cricket journalist and broadcaster. Roebuck was in South Africa covering the Test series between South Africa and Australia for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation when he jumped to his death.

What makes this sad tale "creepy", to quote cricket author and historian David Frith, is that Peter Roebuck wrote the foreword to Frith's book *By His Own Hand: A Study In Cricket Suicides*, first published in 1991. Indeed, Roebuck poignantly wrote: "Some people have predicted a gloomy end for this writer. It will not be so."

Frith wrote in the *Independent*, three days after Roebuck's death, "I felt compelled to write the first major study of suicide among cricketers; a book which simply demanded to be written. Among my countless files, the shoebox containing cuttings and research notes concerning self-destruction in cricket was near to overflowing."

Frith's contention is that cricket has suffered a higher suicide rate than any other sport. Again, in his foreword to Frith's book, Roebuck had written: "Cricket – and most cricketers – has its dark secrets, its skeletons".

HAMILCAR_SOUTH / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: 'Old Father Time', the weathervane at Lord's Cricket Ground, the traditional home of the game.

By His Own Hand examined over 80 cases of suicide among cricketers. In July 1893, Drewy Stoddard and Arthur Shrewsbury walked out to open the batting for England against an Australian side including Billy Bruce; all of these men would later commit suicide. In retirement, Stoddard turned to drink and shot himself at the age of 52. Shrewsbury's career ended in 1902 and within a year, fearing for his health, he too reached for a firearm with fatal consequences. Bruce was 61 years old when he drowned himself in the seas off Melbourne. His law practice was failing and he had hit the bottle.

Fred Bull was an effective bowler for Essex between 1895 and 1900. In 1900, his unorthodox bowling action was deemed to be illegal. He changed his style, but as a result lost potency, and consequently Essex dispensed with his services. Bull's body was found washed up on the Lancashire coast in 1910. He had tied a 7lb (3kg) stone round his neck and filled his pockets with pebbles.

A similar watery end met Montague John Druitt, a fast bowler for Winchester College, Dorset and the MCC; he was also one of the main suspects in the Jack the Ripper case. Druitt drowned himself in the Thames in December 1888. His suicide note said he feared he was going mad – a fate suffered by his mother six months earlier.

Sadly, the self-destruction amongst cricketers is not restricted to the 19th century. *By his Own Hand* was revised and expanded under the title *Silence of The Heart* in 2001. In his preface, David Frith states that the peak decades for cricket suicides were the 1980s and 1990s, with each decade providing 20 suicides. The book's foreword was provided by former England captain turned psychotherapist Mike Brearley. He discussed the outwardly ebullient former Yorkshire wicket keeper David Bairstow, who was found hanged on 5 January 1999. Brearley had captained Bairstow when they played together in one-day internationals for England and therefore had some insights to offer about his former team-mate's death.

Discussing whether there is a direct relationship between cricket and suicide, Roebuck wrote: "Cricketers are especially vulnerable because the game, by its nature, attracts sensitive men of æsthetic temperament, the very men who are, in the end, least well served by it". Ten years later, Brearley offered a more sophisticated analysis: "In the end, it is not cricket that causes suicide. People kill themselves for reasons that are internal to them and their history." But even if the tragedies are ultimately personal, in their cumulative effects they certainly reshape our perception of the sport as a whole.

Given the dark shadow suicide has cast over cricket's history, it's rather macabre that one of the landmarks at Lord's, the world's most famous cricket ground, is the 'Old Father Time' weather vane. The vane's ironwork takes the shape of an image of the Grim Reaper removing a bail from a wicket to signify close of play… FT

FURTHER READING

David Frith: *By His Own Hand*, Stanley Paul, 1991.

David Frith: *Silence Of The Heart*, Mainstream, 2001.

Howzat!

BARRY BALDWIN presents a compendium of cricketing curiosities.

BARRY BALDWIN is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and Emeritus Professor of Classics at the University of Calgary. He is a journalist, a mystery fiction writer, and a regular *FT* columnist.

"Some of the funnier things in it – e.g. Charles Fort swatting zombies with a cricket bat" – Gordon Rennie on his Necronauts *comic strip.*

"It was about the size of a cricket ball: weight four pounds" – Fort, Books, *p117, on a mysterious iron object from the sky, 1852.*

Cricket historians have flailed away at the game's origins. Some start with Prince Edward, son of Edward I ('Longshanks'), playing 'creag' at Newenden, Kent, on Thursday, 10 March 1300 (Julian Calendar = 1301, Gregorian: date established by John Leach, *From Lads to Lord's*, http://bit.ly/zEkfF4 [jl.sl.btinternet.co.uk]). No real evidence, though, that Eddie was the proto-Kipling flannelled fool.

The actual word 'cricket' surfaces in Giovanni Florio's *World of Words* (1591): "Sqvillare: to play cricket-a-wicket". Florio knew about England from his father, who fled there to escape religious persecution. But some deny any connection with the game, preferring to interpret Florio's definition as some sort of erotic pleasure – Bowling a maiden over?

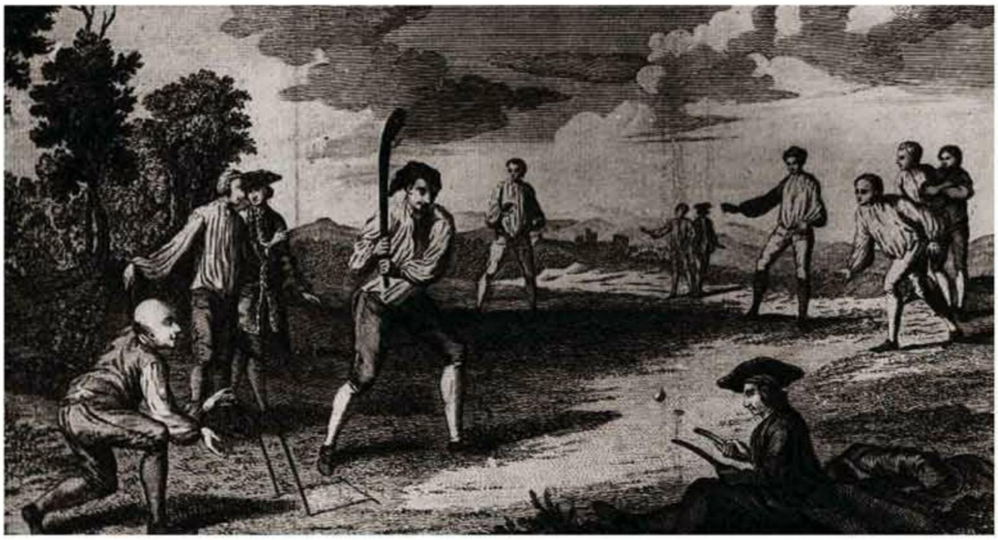
Robert Matthews's 1647 Latin poem *De Collegio Wintoniensi* describes Winchester boys playing a game with *pila* (stick) and *bacillo* (ball). Cricket? Or field hockey, by then a well-established game?[1]

Cricket at all levels took off in the 18th century. William Goldwin published (29 March 1706) a Latin poem in 95 Virgilian hexameters, *In Certamen Pilæ – Anglice, A Cricket Match.*[2] Salient details: only two stumps were used; batsmen had to touch the umpire when running; two "trusty" (naturally) souls kept score by notching sticks with knives – how would they have coped with 20-20 and one-day sloggings? Also, noisy fielders suggest 'sledging' was already in full throttle.

Talking of Virgil, in 1914 as World War I was being described with classical imagery and sporting metaphors, a letter-writer to *The Times* complained that the only thing lacking in his *Aeneid* was cricket.

Keeping this classical spirit alive, Surrey boasted a distinguished player named Julius Cæsar (1830–1878), described in WG Grace's *Cricketing Reminiscences* (1899; repr. 1988) as one of the best all-rounders of the day. In fact, there were enough homonyms to make a team. Games between a team consisting of 12 (a supranumerary meant to evoke Suetonius's *The Twelve Cæsars*) Cæsars against both 'Eleven Gentlemen of Godalming' and against an All-England team at Tilbury Green.[3]

BELOW: An early game of cricket being played on the Artillery Ground, London, dated to 1743.



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Cricket is mentioned in John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744), intended for children. Hampshire naturalist Gilbert White (**FT198:21**) describes a match in which "Tom bats, his grandmother bowls, his great-grandmother watches out [i.e. fields]". Imagine even the MCC could manage a draw with this amiable little outfit.

(By the way, the first literary mention of baseball, which supplanted cricket as America's premier game after the Civil War, is in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* – did she ever make cucumber sandwiches for a Sunday afternoon match?)

Samuel Johnson, deriving it from "*cryce*, Saxon, a stick", defined cricket as "a sport at which the contenders drive a ball with sticks in opposition to each other". In a *Rambler* essay (no.146, 10 Aug, 1751), he exemplified cricket as one of the typical London man-about-town's enthusiasms. A Latin poem *On the Gin Act*, possibly by Johnson, contains the Horatian tag *dulce lenimen* (sweet relief), the very phrase used in the September 1784 Minute Book of the Hambledon Cricket Club to designate its new Ladies' Loo – first mention of 'quantitative easing'?

Showing bluestocking Hannah More around Pembroke (his old college) in 1782, Johnson (in Boswell's *Life*) reminisced, "There we played at cricket." Boswell's venerable editors, Hill & Powell, doubt he ever actually played. I hope this biographical umpiring decision is wrong. Johnson's powerful body and limbs might well qualify him as an 18th-century 'Beefy' Botham, although his severe deficiencies of hearing and vision would surely have impeded his prowess. And I fancy that he would have adopted a Dr Grace-like attitude towards adverse umpiring calls.

Mind you, if the Great Cham of English literature seems an unlikely flasher of willow, what about Hitler? An article by Ben MacIntyre (*Times*, 18 March 2010) describes Adolf's one venture to the crease in a match he fixed up against some British prisoners of war. His chief concerns were to find in cricket the key to national character and to rewrite the rules, notably advocating the abandonment of pads as 'unmanly'. These twin concerns link him both to Godwin and Sir Henry Newbolt's *Vitai Lampada* ("There's a breathless hush in the close tonight… Play Up and Play the Game"). The scorecard for Adolf's one appearance is sadly lost. But, if the British Army marching song be right, Hitler will have only had one ball…

Cricket was now *the* drawing card. No trouble getting bums on seats, even on weekdays. The *Gentleman's Magazine* (September 1743) thunders against a sport already corrupted by commercialism and gambling that "draws numbers of people from their employments, to the ruin of their families".

Contemporary reports emphasise the huge bets riding on the results. These inevitably engendered accusations of bribery and match-fixing. One famous player took the then colossal sum of £100 to lose a match. The cricket-loving Victorian writer Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1865, not one of *those* Mitfords!) lamented that "the noble game has become an affair of bettings and hedgings and cheatings."[4] Hansie Cronje and certain Pakistanis would have been quite at home.

Enter, too, early Barmy Armies and football-style hooligans; 18th-century spectators did not sit quietly appreciating the stroke-play, occasionally murmuring "Oh, well played, sir." A 1776 Kent-Essex fixture at Tilbury Fort erupted when Essex objected that Kent had included a foreign player. In the resulting mayhem, a Kent man shot dead an Essex one, a soldier was likewise killed, and an invalid spectator bayoneted.[5]

In 1787, local colliers, furious at Coventry's loss to Leicestershire, attacked a group of winning supporters boozing it up at The Bull in Hinckley, the *Birmingham Gazette* reporting "a scene of bloodshed scarcely to be credited in a country distinguished for its acts of humanity".[6]

Anything might spark off a commotion. In a 1764 encounter, "a gentleman of fortune at Weybridge was taken up by a warrant for a bastard child, which caused a great deal of diversion. The gentleman drew his sword, presented a pistol, and went off in triumph."[7]

Since Kerry Packer, gimmicks have become more desperate – I write as one with no time for one-day affairs played in pyjamas or 20-20 slog-fests, my ideal game being a rain-interrupted five-day match ending in a draw. Modern novelties, though, are no match for 18th-century ones.

In July 1761, a "great match" was played at Westburn Green near Beaconsfield between 11 married men and 11 bachelors for £100. The husbands won – no doubt their coach had barred them from the marital bed the night before.

Gender equality was achieved in September 1765 at Upham in Hampshire, when a team of married women took on one composed of spinsters. Not for money, prize being "a large plum cake, a barrel of ale, and a regale of tea". On this occasion, the unmarried ones won – these maidens were not bowled over.

According to taste (it "affected much sport to the spectators"), more hilarious or macabre was the match arranged on 13 July 1769 by the notorious politician John Wilkes at Blackheath.[8] Drawn from the ranks of Greenwich College Pensioners, it pitted 11 one-armed men against 11 one-legged, being "won with ease" by the former; their batting and bowling clearly not 'armless.

This encounter (makes me think of *Beyond The Fringe*'s 'unidexter' auditioning for the role of Tarzan) was repeated at the Rosemary Branch, Peckham Rye (Step Forward Muriel Spark and Del Boy), according to a far-off report in South Africa's *Eastern Province Herald* (3 Dec 1861). The one-arms won by 14 runs, but most of the report concentrates on the one-legged Peggy, " a lean, droll, rather drunk fellow", equally maladroit in the field and at the crease, who, when the game was lost, "performed a pass soul expressive of hopeless despair, and stumped off for a pot of stout".

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE / RISCHGITZ

ABOVE: Some of the MCC team before leaving for Australia, 1 October 1863. Julius Cæsar can be seen at top left.

If, like the newspaper's editor, you think that barely credible, what about the September 1762 singles clash between two butchers in Tot-hill Fields, Westminster, the wickets pitched 24 yards (22m) apart on each side of a large pool, the combatants playing (for an hour before one conceded and paid up the wager) in the water – naked.

As one who never ventured to the crease without his trusty box, I reached nervously for my goolies on first reading this.[9]

Before all these exotic variants, cricket had already been under fire from religious quarters objecting to Sunday games. Let us hope Scyld Berry never has to report anything like the following incident spelled out in a July 1712 Puritan tract:

"In a meadow near Maiden Head Thicket, as they were at play, there arose out of the ground a man in black with a cloven-foot, which put them in a great consternation; but as they stood in the frightened condition, the Devil flew up into the air, in a dark cloud with flashes of fire, and in his room he left a very beautiful woman, and Robert Yates and Richard Moors hastily stepping up to her, being charm'd with her beauty went to kiss her, but in the attempt they instantly fell down dead. The other two, Simon Jackson and George Grantham, seeing this tragical sight, ran home to Maiden-Head, where they now lye in a distracted condition."[10]

"Fuckin' 'Ell, It's Fred Titmus" – Half Man, Half Biscuit

(Editor Stopped Play) FT

NOTES

1 Principal Sources: 18th-century magazine and newspaper reports, many extracted in HT Waghorn: *Cricket Scores, notes &c. from 1730–1773* (Blackwood, 1889; repr, Kessinger Publishing, Whitefish, Montana, 2009), and in Christopher Lee: *Through the Covers: An Anthology of Cricket Writing*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1997; early cricketing memoirs, notably John Nyren (1764–1837): *Cricketers of My Time* & *The Young Cricketer's Tutor*, Effingham Wilson, 1833; John Major (forgive me, Mat Coward!): *More Than A Game*, Harper Collins, 2007.

2 See my detailed study: 'A Classical Cricketing Classic', *Vates* 3 (2011, online), pp24–9.

3 See Geoff Amey: *Julius Cæsar, The Ill-fated Cricketer*, Bodyline Books, Bolton, 2000; Malcolm Linfield: The *Cæsar Connection – Part Two: The Origin of the Cæsars* (online); Richard Everard Webster: *Surrey Cricket: Its History and Associations*, ed. Charles Alcock, Longmans, 1902.

4 *The Life of Mary Mitford*, ed. AG L'Estrange, Richard Bentley, 1870, v2, p169. Her description of rural cricket in *Our Village*, G Bell, 1876, from sketches in *The Lady's Magazine*, 1819–1832, is dubbed "the first major prose on the game" in *Barclay's World of Cricket*, 2nd ed. (Collins, 1980), p582.

5 See Major, *op. cit.*, p84, also the relevant *QI* website.

6 Described and discussed in *Crowds*, ed. Jeffrey Schnapp & Matthew Tiews, Stanford Univ. Press, 2007, pp119–20.

7 This and most of the following episodes can be found in Lee, taken from Waghorn (n1, above).

8 *North Briton* 139, 13 July 1769, p250.

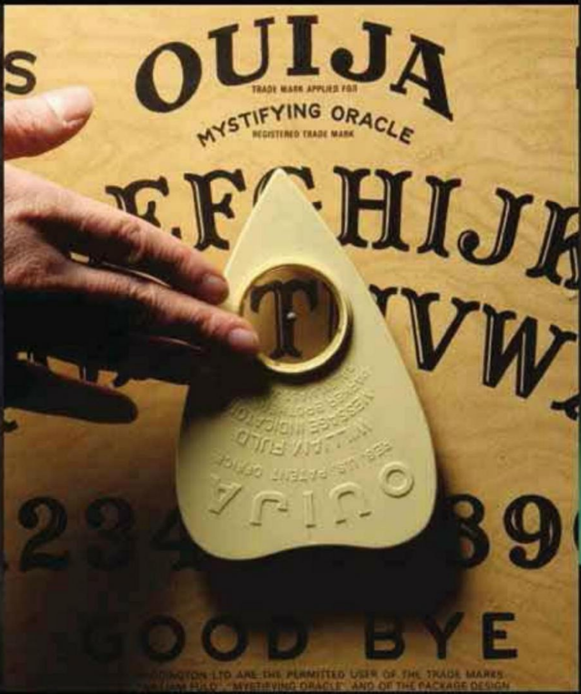
9 There was off-pitch nudity too. Recently catalogued Canterbury Cathedral documents (details and extracts online) include a 1762 account of Edward Bligh killing Thomas Dilnutt over a cricket match incident and bet thereon, both men drunk and naked.

10 Text reproduced in (ed. Anthony Bateman & Jeffrey Hill) *The Cambridge Companion to Cricket* (2011), pp27–28. One further wonders how many cricketers in this age committed suicide? Such macabre reflection is prompted by David Frith's inventory of 80-some cases in his *By His Own Hand*, Hutchinson, 1991, a volume comporting preface by batsman-sports journalist Peter Roebuck – who recently (2011) killed himself; cf. Michael Henderson: "Deadly Game", *Spectator*, 19 Nov 2011, p18; see also p55 of this issue.

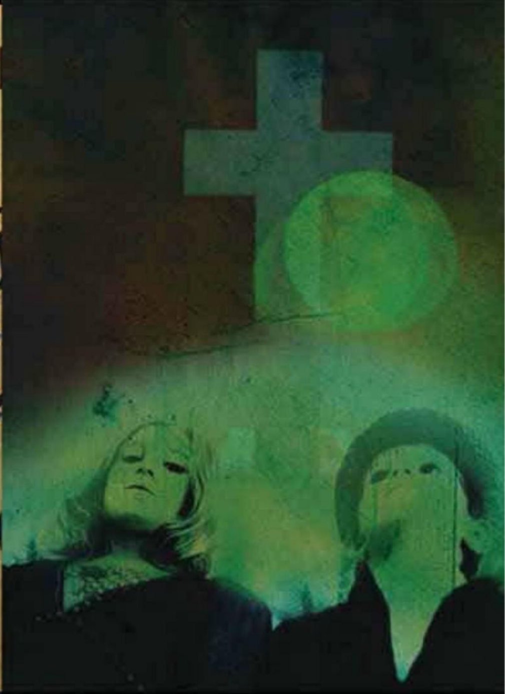
- For the hypothesis that cricket originated in Flanders, see **FT249:9**.

More tales of the unexpected...

The faceless figure that stepped out of the fog



The ouija session that summoned a shadow man



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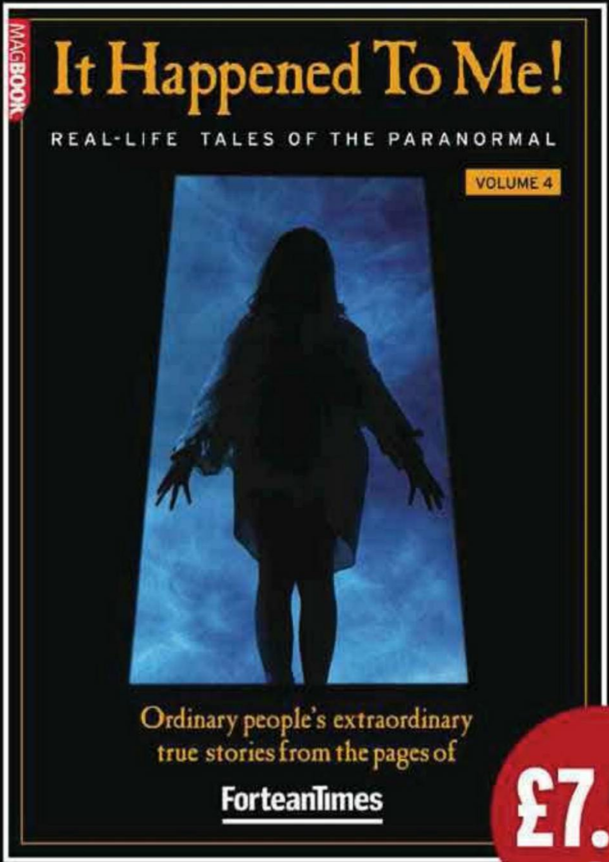

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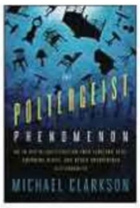
Agents with unusual brains

A calm examination of poltergeists suggests recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis as the most likely explanation, but keeps an open mind to the other possibilities



The Poltergeist Phenomenon

An In-depth Investigation into Floating Beds, Smashing Glass, and Other Unexplained Disturbances

Michael Clarkson

New Page Books 2011

Pb, 288pp, notes, bib, ind, $15.99/£13.99,
ISBN 9781601631473

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

Michael Clarkson confesses up-front that he is not a parapsychologist but a journalist who was "heavily into police, investigative and sports reporting for four decades". He seems pretty savvy to be just an ordinary journalist, having written six books on psychological topics, including fear, the paranoia of the tragic Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, and the reclusiveness of JD Salinger. However, he declares his interested in poltergeists, UFOs, ESP and ghosts and was "always looking for reasonable proof" and set out "to find out for myself".

So, what did he find out? Over a period of five years, he investigated 75 cases that caught his interest and interviewed the 'victims' and eyewitnesses to the perplexing manifestations they experienced directly. In a field dominated by dry, academic studies at one end, and largely unsubstantiated narratives by believers in a 'spirit world' at the other, and populated by a variety of the sceptical and the credulous, Clarkson provides a fresh and intelligent analysis of the central enigma of poltergeist phenomena which includes both psychical and physical 'forces'.

Throughout history, mankind's understanding of these often violent and disruptive events was that they were caused by unhappy ghosts or spirits; poltergeist means 'noisy spirit' in German. Reports would note voices, loud noises or concussions, objects moving 'by themselves' or flying ('thrown'?) through the air; fires and flows of liquids of unknown origin; drops in temperature; odd appearances and disappearances of objects; doors opening and shutting or electrical devices malfunctioning. In extreme cases, we hear of attacks on and sometimes possession of a 'victim'. Many early writers, including Fort, noticed that the focus of a significant number of these disturbances was often a pubescent boy or girl, and usually one isolated in troubled circumstances – an orphan, an adoptee, a maid etc. Fort noticed a smaller number of cases occurring around the ill or dying. It was not until the 20th century that the pioneering parapsychologist Nandor Fodor proposed that these 'agents' might be, unconsciously, translating their emotional distress into an unknown psychokinetic force that manifested phenomena in the environment. This was developed by the late William Roll (obit. **FT286:26**), who called the unknown projected force "recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis" (RSPK).

Clarkson homes in on the RSPK theory as the most plausible of the available explanations. He said (in an interview elsewhere): "In only about five per cent of the 75 cases that I reviewed, was there a spirit involved," and in the rest "a number of components must come together for a 'perfect psychic storm', and that's one reason RSPK is rare. There is usually stress or repression in a house and the poltergeist agents seem frustrated and have no other way of expressing themselves." Obviously, if objects are being moved, the required energy is being supplied from somewhere. Clarkson concludes that "the agents often have unusual brains" – this is something Roll was exploring before his death – "and have an ability to tap into nearby energy sources", among which he includes "household electricity, geomagnetic storms, magnetic fields in the area, or even electrical energy from the human mind-body". He also believes that RSPK can "temporarily suspend gravity [..] to allow the objects to move".

> **"the agents often have an ability to tap into electrical energy from the human mind-body"**

He also interviewed "parapsychologists, psychologists, academics, magicians and skeptics" and presents a range of opinions. Clarkson agrees that some of the cases "have holes" or are the result of trickery; yet he finds many others that raise serious questions. A good number of them revisit investigations conducted by Roll and his team, including the famous case of Tina Resch (**FT190:38–44**), and several outbreaks of flying objects in otherwise ordinary families with stressed or disturbed children. Along the way, he also addresses cheating, the hostility of 'skeptics', folk who charge for or exploit investigations, and poltergeist motifs in movies. The book is well structured, and Clarkson writes well and debates fairly.

In particular, the case of an Amerindian orphan adopted by a Bridgeport, Connecticut, family after their son died, seems impressive. Dramatic movements, flights and falls of heavy furniture (eg, a TV set and shelving) occurred in full view of several police and fire-investigation officers. When their senior officer rejected their testimony and blamed the phenomena on the adopted girl, the officers stood by their witness statements.

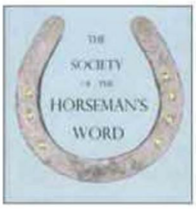
The issue of police witnesses is a keen one with Clarkson, who comments: "It continues to astonish me that skeptics dismiss poltergeist phenomena despite the testimony from many hundreds of eyewitnesses, including investigating police officers. Do these skeptics have an agenda or are they simply in denial?" In fact, he gives some space in the book to "51 cops who believe they saw a poltergeist and had the courage to report to their superiors". Clarkson adds: "Having been a police reporter for daily newspapers for 13 years, I tend to listen when they speak." On that score, Clarkson is well-worth listening to as well.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
BALANCED EXAMINATION OF THE NOISY SPIRITS **8**

Horse talking

Not much whispering, but lots of secret society rituals and ploughman's songs



The Society of the Horseman's Word

Ed: Ben Fernee

The Society of Esoteric Endeavour (caduceusbooks.com) 2011
Hb, 183pp, illus, notes, £28.00, ISBN 9780956371300
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £26.60

I opened this book in two kinds of hope: first (let's be honest) that it would reveal what, exactly, the old Scottish and East Anglian horse-whisperers murmured to the equines put in their charge, and why their words worked; second, that it would likewise expand on what relatively little is known about these semi-secret societies.

On the first count, it disappoints. There's more information on the Word and its adjuncts (such as a foal's milt and a frog or toad's ilium, used in conjunction with raw flesh and various herbs, according to need) in George Ewart Evans's *The Pattern Under the Plough* (1966).

Some of their more esoteric skills, such as controlling a horse's behaviour without sound or touch, were almost certainly highly refined, endlessly rehearsed, extensions of what's now called 'natural horsemanship'. A member of the Society was sworn to treat his animals kindly – the texts include a 'Horse's Petition' – and to challenge a 'brother' who did not.

As Fernee points out, the Society was probably the UK's earliest animal welfare organisation, as well as a surreptitious form of trade union whose secrets kept its members in work as specialist horse-handlers.

The real value of the book is its illumination of the Aberdeenshire incarnation of the Society itself, its rituals, and its members – farriers, blacksmiths, and freelance ploughmen. The last lived communally while they were single, and had a justified reputation for hard drinking and riotous behaviour, as well as being mad, bad, and dangerous to know: the Word reputedly imparted power over women as well as horses, and a maid *enceinte* with an 'irresistible' ploughman's child suffered less shame than if, say, the village parson was responsible.

The rituals of the Society seem to have been adapted from ox-drivers' – oxen were used until about 1730 for hauling ploughs – and initiation was a classic, humiliating rite of passage involving the Devil, a mock execution and a lot of whisky. Others were probably expanded over the years in the interests of increasing the Society's glamour of secrecy – the elaborations, in a nice example of the pizza effect, probably being lifted from (inaccurate) denunciations of the Horsemen.

Most of the book consists of original texts (reset for legibility, not reproduced in facsimile) and accounts of the Society's rituals, catechisms, recognition signals and ploughmen's songs: this is its real value.

Unfortunately, the whole book is littered with literals, and even more unfortunately, the proof-reader is credited by name. There's also no index. One hopes this otherwise well-produced if somewhat unfinished work will attract more first-hand informants and encourage the publisher to create a comprehensive archive of lore, fully contextualised, on the Horseman's Word.

Peter Brookesmith

Fortean Times Verdict
MORE USEFUL FOR SECRET SOCIETY BUFFS THAN HIPPOPHILES 6

The Presence of the Past

Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature

Rupert Sheldrake

Icon Books 2011
Pb, 560pp, ind, gloss, refs, notes, £9.99, ISBN 9781848313064
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

Rupert Sheldrake's first book, *A New Science of Life*, appeared in 1981, since when he has written nine others challenging the way we, and the scientific establishment, think about the nature of life, consciousness and intelligence. That book's central introduction was 'formative causation', Sheldrake's theory of how all growing things develop from their simplest embryonic beginnings to later and higher levels of complexity. The agents or medium of this development are 'morphic fields', which harmonise each other by a mutual resonance that is independent of space and time. So radical was this proposal that *Nature* described the book as "a candidate for burning". Sheldrake followed it up seven years later with *Presence of the Past*, which went into detail about the nature of 'morphic resonance' as a type of memory inherent in nature. If nothing else, this book is a brilliant history and analysis of the viable theories of memory relevant to the problem of how growing things – from crystals and cells to organs and bodies, and even society itself – tend to follow, and reproduce the form of, their predecessors.

This new edition is a refreshing antidote to the materialistic and mechanistic views that have dominated biology since the 19th century. Sheldrake points out that in the intervening 23 years, his most vociferous critics have uncovered no evidence against his "inevitably controversial" theory or faults in his logic. "Instead, they dismissed this theory as unnecessary." Sheldrake lays into the hubris of so-called predictive science. The hugely expensive human genome project has been unable to explain anomalies such as why rice plants have 15,000 more genes than a human, who has 77,000 fewer genes than expected; and why far fewer genes than expected account for the inheritance of a characteristic. He shows that recent advances in other sciences (eg, scanning, computer modelling, physics and neurology) have likewise not invalidated 'formative causation' but have shown it to be a contender for a fundamental principle underlying the biology of all living things.

His arguments are difficult, but Sheldrake writes clearly and carefully so that one of the most profound and far-reaching books of modern scientific philosophy is eminently accessible to the general reader.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
BRILLIANT HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF THE THEORIES OF MEMORY 8

Ken Campbell

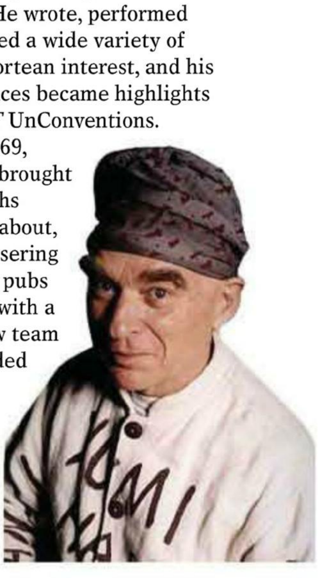
The Great Caper

Michael Coveney

Nick Hern Books (nickhernbooks.co.uk) 2011
Pb, 268pp, illus, bib, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9781848420762
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49

Ken Campbell
The Great Caper

When *Fortean Times* began in 1973 as *The News* (a photocopied, typewritten, newsletter), Ken Campbell (1941–2008) was one of its first subscribers and most enthusiastic supporters. Its eclectic subject matter and mixture of humour, high weirdness and seriousness were mirrors of Campbell's preoccupations and passions. He wrote, performed and directed a wide variety of shows of fortean interest, and his performances became highlights of early *FT* UnConventions.



From 1969, Campbell brought urban myths and knockabout, ferret-trousering comedy to pubs and clubs with a Road Show team that included Bob Hoskins, Dave Hill and Sylvester McCoy. He invented the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool in the 1970s and undertook ambitious, epic productions on shoestring budgets, such as adaptations of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson's *Illuminatus! Trilogy*, Neil Oram's *The Warp*, and an opera based on Lovecraft's *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.

He was an artistic director of the Everyman, organised an underwater musical recital (in a swimming pool), and his output includes a puppet show about Grimaldi, verbally inventive plays for children, and wonderfully crafted, award-winning monologues which wove fortean themes with elements from his own, passionately lived life.

Campbell presented several much admired science documentaries for Channel 4, and appeared in *Fawlty Towers*, *Marple*, and *Sherlock Holmes*, as well as several films, including *Saving Grace*, and Derek Jarman's *The Tempest*.

In the final stages of his career, he revived interest in ventriloquism and launched a kind of improvisation which was at once more cerebral and more fantastical than anything seen before.

Michael Coveney is a theatre critic who followed Campbell's many theatrical adventures with an honesty and clear-sightedness lacking in many reviewers. His official biography – which was also Radio 4 Book of the Week in April 2011 – is a delightful romp through Campbell's personal and professional lives.

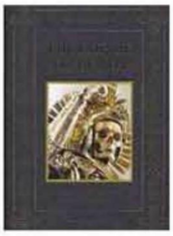
Richard Eyre, sometimes a colleague and always a fan, contributes a foreword describing how Ken "enriched all our lives by being consistently original, inventive and funny." He adds that Ken "made you think, see and hear the world differently" and that he has never known anyone "who seized the moment with quite so much enthusiasm – and who was quite so relentless in wanting to share it with others."

James Nye

Fortean Times Verdict
A DELIGHTFUL ROMP THROUGH KEN CAMPBELL'S LIFE **8**

Drop-dead gorgeous

Rather than gawping at death, this beautiful study of charnel houses testifies to the need to embrace it and so affirm life



The Empire of Death

A Cultural History of Ossuaries and Charnel Houses

Paul Koudounaris

Thames and Hudson 2011
Hb, 224pp, illus, notes, ind, £29.95, ISBN 9780500251782
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £25.95

The Grim Reaper eventually lays his icy hand on us all, but in the West today (outside spiritualism and some religious movements), death remains taboo. We commemorate the dead with, all too often, decaying bouquets, yellowing photographs and fading memories. Many graveyards are overgrown, dilapidated and vandalised. This marginalisation of death contrasts sharply with attitudes between the 16th and 19th centuries, when several European religious establishments founded ossuaries and charnel houses. As Paul Koudounaris notes in his excellent, heavily-illustrated book, "their morbid elegance is puzzling to modern eyes, and they are among the most misunderstood of religious monuments". Yet charnel houses hold a message that resonates today.

Koudounaris points out that ossuaries and charnel houses once formed "part of a dialogue with death that has now fallen silent". Yet for centuries people visited ossuaries and charnel houses to ask the remains for help and advice as well as to express gratitude by "providing the dead with shrines, prayers, and various forms of offerings".

For instance, visitors to the Monastery of Santa Maria della Pace in Palermo "lovingly" robed the mummified and skeletal remains to perpetuate "their relationship with their ancestors and loved ones". It's a far more intimate relationship than occasionally glancing through a photo album or visiting the graveside on the deceased's birthday.

Most ossuary chapels offered *memento mori* to reinforce the theological argument that to ensure their salvation, the living should "confront the image of death" and prepare for eternity. The remains offered a stark reminder that however beautiful, rich and successful we are in life, we return to the earth. But some ossuary chapels also commemorate specific events.

Ossuaries in Solferino and San Martino della Battaglia hold the remains of some of the 40,000 people killed during the horrific Battle of Solferino, part of the Second Italian War of Independence, in 1859. After witnessing the slaughter, the Swiss businessman Henry Dunant campaigned for a neutral organisation to care for the wounded, leading to the Geneva conventions and the Red Cross.

So, the Battle of Solferino isn't likely to be forgotten any time soon. That probably wouldn't be the case for events in Campo Maior Portugal on 16 September 1732. Lightning struck the castle, igniting 6,000 barrels of gunpowder and 5,000 rounds of ammunition. The resulting inferno destroyed 836 houses and killed 1,076 people. Were it not for the macabre beauty of Capela dos Ossos, the tragedy would be no more than a forgotten footnote in history.

This beautiful book may seem ideal for goth coffee tables. But *The Empire of Death* is far more important than just satisfying morbid, macabre voyeurism. Koudounaris's commentary is intelligent, informative and sympathetic. Just as sculptors create deep art from unpromising lumps of rock, the ossuaries' artists created profound statements from unpromising lumps of bone. Perhaps because ossuaries are so transgressive to modern mainstream sensibilities, *The Empire of Death* is an eloquent testament to art's ability to help create meaning in the midst of an often seemingly meaningless existence.

The dialogue with the dead was "once an important part of the spiritual life of many in the Christian world". As Koudounaris notes, ossuaries offer the "opportunity to affirm life by embracing death". Whatever your religious beliefs (or even if you have none), *The Empire of Death* offers, for all its morbid fascination, an articulate, potent and beautiful testament to the need to affirm life.

And it's a sobering reminder that one mark of a civilisation is the manner in which it deals with the dead. Koudounaris shows that we still have a lot to learn from our ancestors.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict
BEAUTIFUL, MOVING – MORE THAN A GOTH COFFEE TABLE BOOK **10**

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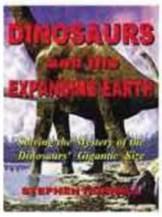
Very big and far away

Reduced gravity explains how pterosaurs could fly and dinosaurs run, but the book is better on geology than dinos



Dinosaurs and the Expanding Earth

Solving the Mystery of the Dinosaurs' Size

Stephen Hurrell

Oneoff Publishing.com 2011
Hb, 216pp, illus, £12.95, ISBN 9780952260370
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £12.95

If it's correct, mechanical design engineer Stephen Hurrell's idea (first put forward in the 1994 hardback edition) would be the biggest paradigm-shift since Copernicus announced the Earth moved round the Sun. Puzzled at how the hugest dinosaurs could support their own weight, Hurrell has concluded that gravity was less in the dinosaur days of the Mesozoic era, and that our planet has been expanding in size. This has in turn increased the force of its gravity.

The "expanding Earth hypothesis" has always ended up consigned to the science establishment's dustbin of what Fort called 'damned' data. Galileo proved mathematically that a giant human would crush itself unless its bones were proportionally many times thicker than in conventionally sized humans. But the history of science makes no mention of Prof. C John Mann, Sherman P Kanagy, James Maxlow, Prof. Lance Endersbee, Giancarlo Scalera, geophysicist Ott Christoph Hilgenber and other "expanding Earth" and "reduced gravity Earth" advocates who approached the subject from various disciplines.

The 29m (95ft)-high horsetail ferns and 45cm (18in) wingspan dragonflies of 300 million years ago could only have flourished in a world in which "gravity must have been about one third of the present value", according to Hurrell's estimates.

A reduced-gravity prehistoric Earth also neatly explains the mystery of "too heavy to fly pterosaurs" or how enormous predatory or preyed-upon dinosaurs could run. *Archæopteryx* and other even less efficient gliding reptiles of the Mesozoic start to make more sense in a Cretaceous period where gravity had a value of less than 0.9g, an earlier Jurassic period with gravity at 0.5g (equivalent to gravity on present-day Mars) and with gravity at a mere 0.33g when dinosaurs took their first steps in the Triassic.

As gravity increased, animals became less massive – Hurrell notes the Jurassic behemoths like Brachiosaurus of 150 million years ago were not matched by the late Cretaceous fauna of 80 million years later, while the biggest ever prehistoric land mammals never came close. Even the evolution of avian and mammalian four-chambered hearts could reflect the higher blood pressures needed as gravity rose.

Dinosaurs succeeds in the considerable task of making very boring geology gripping. Earth's oldest-known rocks "have chemical compositions known only to form" at about a millionth of our current air pressure. As Earth expanded, and the gravity increased, heavier gases like oxygen and CO_2 lingered in the thickening atmosphere instead of dissipating through it.

There's supporting evidence from the Moon and Mars, both of which have "rills" – huge tears in their surfaces – which are convincingly explained as "expansion cracks".

What drives Earth's alleged expansion? There's 300,000 tonnes of "meteoric bombardment" annually, as our Solar System progresses through the galaxy and into cosmic dust clouds. The 1980s Dynamic Explorer satellite apparently showed 10 million house-sized comets a day – too small to have been previously detected – vaporising as they hit our atmosphere, leaving only dust and water vapour, but at a billion tonnes-worth a year, that's an awful lot of material over geological time.

While this book makes even geology sound cool, it sadly does less well at what should be much easier – making the dinosaurs come to life. The cover illustration suggests it's about really cool, huge dinos, but the book is mostly about the expanding Earth, with a mere 80 pages on dinosaurs, which aren't even revisited in the conclusion.

The amateur palæontologist in me spotted some dino info was wrong, while the outdated prehistoric animal illustrations reminded me of one of my older brother's early 1960s children's dinosaur books. Many dinosaur discoveries within the last decade would lend weight (pun intended) to Hurrell's hypothesis but are omitted. The book confuses two different-looking species of giant armadillo, asserts "Iguanodon walked on two legs" – it's been regarded as mostly bipedal for well over 20 years – and incorrectly dates Quetzalcoatlus to the Jurassic, not the Cretaceous when it actually flew (in what would have been heavier skies, according to Hurrell).

If Hurrell's theories are to attract the palaeontology/engineering crossovers they invite, their presentation calls for a deeper love of science's greatest gift to pulling in the general reader – really cool, awesome, bizarre kick-ass dinosaurs rather than treating dinosaurs as just another engineering problem.

Matt Salusbury

Fortean Times Verdict

COMPELLING ON GEOPHYSICS, LESS SO ON THE DINOSAURS **7**

London's Curse

Murder, Black Magic and Tutankhamun in London's West End

Mark Benyon

The History Press 2011
Hb, 224pp, £17.99, ISBN 9780752463124
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £15.99

LONDON'S
CURSE

London's fascination with Orientalism reached a peak in the 1920s with the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and the 20 victims of its 'curse'. These sudden deaths set the scene for a re-acquaintance with Aleister Crowley, this time as the perpetrator of 'curse'-related deaths in London's West End.

Crowley took it upon himself to avenge the disrespect shown to the pharaohs and mollify his secret Egyptian master, Aiwass, with ritual killings. He convinced Marie-Marguerite, who shot wealthy 'prince' Ali Kamel Fahmy Bey, that no jury would convict a Western woman desperate to escape an abusive spouse. Fahmy Bey's murder-by-proxy was justified by the affront he caused to the gods by participating in a larky snapshot in front of the tomb. Flimsy.

And the partnership in two murders of Marie-Marguerite and Crowley is conjecture. The forays into Crowley's thinking are fascinating, but hard evidence is scarce, and the strain starts to show the further we go into Mark Benyon's web of magic-motivated homicide.

Why did Crowley wait until seven years after the murder of Fahmy Bey before defenestrating Lord Westbury, owner of a vase from the tomb, when the suicide of Westbury's son is a more likely influence than a pilfered vase?

Benyon draws strands together with a prosecutor's assurance, but he would have a tough time proving the crimes attributed to his protagonist in a real court. London's subcultures and dark deeds have been described with style, and he outlines a pattern of magic and fortean coincidence, even if some of the conclusions are preposterous.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict

HISTORY TO BE INGESTED WITH A SIZEABLE SACK OF SALT **3**

ALSO RECEIVED

We peruse two recent books by *FT*'s resident cryptozoologist – an encyclopædia and a collection drawn from these pages

KARL SHUKER'S ALIEN ZOO

Karl Shuker

CFZ Press (www.cfz.org) 2011
Pb, pp394, index, bib, illus, £14.99
ISBN 9781905723621

Karl Shuker is a member of that small but dedicated band that calls themselves 'Fortean Zoologists'. This is all the more remarkable because Karl is a rare creature himself: an independent yet professional zoologist. For more than two decades now, he has kept up a flow of columns and articles in this magazine and here, in a handy and expanded form, is a selection of those from his first 16 years as one of *FT*'s regular columnists. As he did for UFOs, Fort's research foreshadowed the great scope of the interests of today's cryptozoologists, from falls of frogs, astonishing swarms and reports of monsters to 'mystery' beasts; from entombed toads to out- of-place big cats; from modern 'dinosaurs', exceptional teratologies and incredible feats of long-distance homing and migration to ideological debates about the fertility of hybrids, 'meaningful' simulacra, and extraordinary patterns of scarcity and abundance, and the absurd (talking dogs & winged cats). It's all here, brought up to date through Karl's diligent and ongoing research. The result is an informal and profusely illustrated collection which will surprise and delight anyone, young or old, who is fascinated by nature's mysteries.

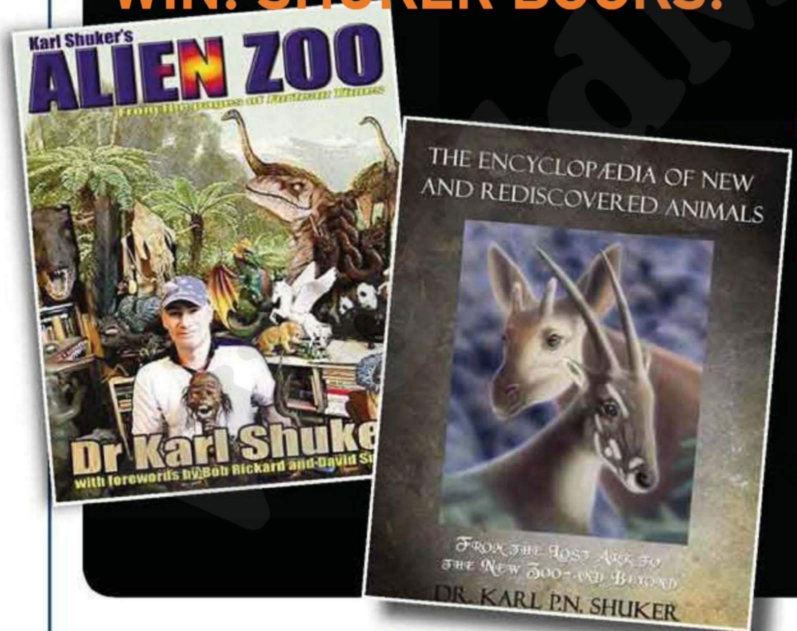
THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF NEW AND REDISCOVERED ANIMALS

Karl Shuker

Coachwhip Publications
(www.coachwhipbooks.com), 2012
Pb, pp370, index, bib, illus, £43.00
ISBN 9781616461089

First, back in 1992, there was *The Lost Ark*; then, in 2001, Karl Shuker's ground-breaking survey of new and rediscovered animals was republished as *The New Zoo*. Now, in what seems to be establishing itself as a once-a-decade overhaul, a third edition has appeared, bringing the story as nearly up to date as is possible. While there are numerous small addenda to the '20th century section, the bulk of the new material covers discoveries made since the millennium, most of them since the last edition of the book. These include such 'stop press' items as the return (after over 100 years) of Sibree's dwarf lemur and the description of a new species of yeti lobster; yet alongside such happy finds there are also worrying tales of extinctions. "A wise scientist does not take pride in how much he knows," writes Shuker, "but rather takes heed of how little he knows". This book is a good reminder of the truth of that dictum, and it's nice to see it back in print and bigger than ever. The hefty price tag – due to the many colour reproductions in this specialist print-on-demand title – is the only real drawback.

WIN! SHUKER BOOKS!


Karl Shuker's
ALIEN ZOO
From the pages of Fortean Times
Dr Karl Shuker
with forewords by Bob Rickard and David S
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DR. KARL P.N. SHUKER

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Dracula Prince of Darkness

Dir Terence Fisher, UK 1966
Studio Canal, £22.99

When the aliens come and ask what Hammer films were like, we should show them this. It's certainly not the best from the iconic studio, but it so comprehensively rattles through the tick-list that it could be described as quintessential. It's got it all: well-dressed aristocrats with impeccable English accents; superstitious villagers; lavish interior sets and plenty of blood. There are coach chases in the woods, a snare-drum rattling score by James Bernard and hints of lesbianism. Yes, this is Hammer, all right.

Two English brothers (the Kents) and their wives are sightseeing in the Carpathian forests. Despite warnings not to even go near it, they spend the night in Dracula's castle in Karlsbad and unwittingly become the catalyst for the vampire's resurrection from the dead.

Dracula himself doesn't actually turn up in the first half, but ironically this is the better part of the film. Director Terence Fisher takes a leaf out of Stoker's book and shows that the Count doesn't have to be actually in the room to be present. Flickering candles and fluttering curtains remind the viewer that the Prince of Darkness is there, even though we've already been shown that he is very dead.

So when one of the Kents is used in a bloody ritual to resurrect the Count himself (still quite a shocking scene, even today) we expect new depths of fright and menace. After all, the dead Dracula was scary enough – imagine what he'll be like when he's alive! Yet it's the living Dracula, played by Christopher Lee, which is the only weak link in the film. It's not how he plays it, but rather how he's written. For a start, he never speaks. Lee famously said he refused to say any of the 'ludicrous' dialogue he was given, but screenwriter Jimmy Sangster maintains he never actually wrote any. Without speech and any truly evil motivations, Dracula lumbers around like a mute thug who seems surprisingly easy to defeat. He pulls worried faces, as if he's a bit stressed out, and that's before he's even started cowering at the crucifixes. Hammer includes his reliance on personal invitation to enter a house and his fear of running water. At one point he has a fight with one of the genteel Englishmen and for a second you're not even sure who is going to win. And *this* is the Prince of Darkness? For a film that so effectively builds the tension when he's off screen, Dracula's actual presence is an anti-climax.

That's not to say the second half isn't good, because it is. And despite the niggles, Lee still has undeniable charisma. A Stoker-inspired scene where he cuts his chest and has a woman drink from the wound is particularly powerful. More interesting, though, is Hammer regular Barbara Shelley, who has two standout scenes. In one she taps on the window, *Salem's Lot*-style, eagerly asking to be invited in because it's so cold outside. It's a deliciously spooky moment. Later she's staked while fully conscious, moving from insane monster to serene corpse in the space of a few frames. Considering she began the film as an uptight party-pooper, her character arc is by far the most pronounced and effective.

It's not the finest slice of Hammer, but there's so much good stuff going on that you'll find yourself reminded of how special Hammer films really were.

Studio Canal's double-play (Blu-ray+DVD) release also includes a worthwhile selection of commentaries and extras, and marks the first in a planned series of HD remasters of Hammer classics.

Rev. Peter Laws

Fortean Times Verdict
NOT HAMMER'S FINEST, BUT STILL PRETTY SPECIAL **7**

The Scarlet Blade/The Brigand of Kandahar

Dir John Gilling, UK 1964/1965
Studio Canal, £15.99 each

Writer/Director John Gilling (1912–1984) had an interesting career. In the Sixties, his signature style was all over TV cult classics *The Saint*, *The Champions* and *Department S*, while in the cinema, after a slow start with fairly dreadful ensemble pieces often featuring Anthony Newley, Sid James *et al*, he moved on to write and/or direct a dozen or so movies for the mighty Hammer Film Productions.

The Scarlet Blade (1964) is a tale of the English Civil War and little more than a revamp of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* with Edward Beverley (Jack Hedley), smuggling Royalists to safety. Roundheads Lionel Jeffries (affecting a strange lisp whenever he needs to add *gravitas* to his words) and Oliver Reed (in actuality, more squarehead than round) are both turncoats, though for different reasons, and both are paranoid, mean-spirited and vicious. As Ollie, all brows and bravado sums up, "Horses are no more to be trusted than women."

The Brigand of Kandahar (1965), set in 1850s India, is probably the better film, if for no other reason than that its exotic setting means there are some women in it, unlike its puritan predecessor. Another film about loyalty and the military, its tale of racism in the forces is sensitively handled and reminiscent of both *Othello* and the real-life Dreyfuss Affair. What's of interest is that in both films Gilling's obvious sympathies are with the outsiders – whether people of mixed race or outright rebels. In *The Scarlet Blade*, there's Pablo the Gypsy and his gang, who offer sanctuary to the outlaws, while in *The Brigand of Kandahar* there are, well, the brigands.

The history all seems fairly authentic, although Ollie Reed's fanatical, fiery-eyed Muslim Eli Khan might be a bit of a stretch. A possible problem for some may be that these anti-racist parables are played-out by white actors fully (and fairly badly) blacked up. This in itself might not constitute a problem (cf the aforementioned *Othello*), but the films' limited production values means they can feel like they're drifting towards the *Carry On Up the Khyber*/*It Ain't Half Hot Mum* end of the stereotypical spectrum, which probably does Gilling's vision a disservice.

Good fun, though, and probably more subversive than you'd expect.

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict
JOLLY GOOD FUN, AND QUITE SUBVERSIVE AT TIMES **7**

Ripping Yarns

Dir Terry Hughes et al, UK 1976
Network, £19.99

Michael Palin and Terry Jones's collaboration on *Ripping Yarns* in 1976 followed the end of *Monty Python* on television two years previously and undoubtedly contains some trademark Python elements, but there's a stronger sense of focus here than in the sketch-based *Python* outings because of the self-contained nature of each half-hour episode. These *Yarns* take their cue from pre-WWII tales of derring-do and *Boy's Own* adventure annuals. In 'Escape from Stalag Luft 112b', POW Major Errol Phipps is desperate to get back to Blighty and battle the Boche; attempting, among other things, to build a glider out of toilet rolls, he's thwarted in his attempts more by the bureaucracy of the upper class British officers in the prison camp than by his German prison guards (who would rather debate the etiquette of entering the British soldiers' huts). 'The Curse of the Claw' involves Sir Kevin Orr, product of unfeeling and repressive Victorian parents, reflecting sadly on the loss of his beloved wife on a dark and stormy night in his Maidenhead home, only to be interrupted by one Captain Merson and a tribe of Burmese tribesmen from the Naga Hills who have lost their way. Sir Kevin proceeds to tell the terrible tale of the claw, which involves a cross-dressing female sailor and his Uncle Jack (who picks up and shrugs off bubonic plague like everyone else shrugs off a cold). 'The Testing of Eric Olthwaite' is about a young man living in the glum Yorkshire village of Denley Moor, where his own parents find him so boring they feign bilious attacks during dinner while he waxes lyrical about getting a job at a bank to become more interesting.

Perhaps the standout episode in this series of nine is 'Tomkinson's Schooldays', in which Tomkinson, while his father is off exploring the Antarctic and his mother wants shot of him so she can be serviced by assorted naked men lurking in the shrubberies of the family seat, finds himself in the sadistic environment of a boys' public school. Graybridge (where, on special days, the boys are crucified on the walls) is run by the school bully (Ian Ogilvie), to whom even the headmaster defers.

There is a supporting cast of instantly recognisable British actors, Roy Kinnear, John Le Mesurier and Denholm Elliot among them (his turn is something of a trial run for his bumbling Dr Marcus Brody in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). Not only do the tales themselves capture something of a lost age, there is an air of the bygone about the comedy itself, satirising the prejudices, class distinctions, repressive sexual hypocrisy and eccentricities of the nation as viewed by the generation who came to adulthood in the 1960s. It's often as gentle as it is brutal, although some of the stereotypes would probably never get past the arbiters of what's deemed right, proper and non-prejudicial nowadays.

Extras include the scripts in PDF, a feature first aired in 1973, called 'Comic Roots' in which Palin returns to his Sheffield home town and a ropey video recording of Palin and Jones's comic play *Secrets*, also from 1973, as well as a commentary by Jones and Palin which provides plenty of background to the episodes.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

RIPPING STUFF WHICH HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME 8

Urban Explorers

Dir Andy Fetscher, Germany 2011

Anchor Bay Entertainment, £12.99/£19.99

The pastime of 'urban exploration', in which adventurous souls seek entry (often clandestine or illegal) to the abandoned structures of our military-industrial past – disused airbases, old power stations, closed hospitals – has really taken off in recent years, so it's no surprise that some enterprising film-makers have seized on its obvious horror possibilities. And where better to set the film than Berlin, with its subterranean air raid shelters and rumoured miles of wartime tunnels?

It's the film's canny awareness of the lure of the forbidden Nazi past, and *Ausländers*' seemingly inexhaustible fascination with Hitler's Third Reich, that gives it more resonance than most of its ilk. As German guide Max leads his little party of sensation-hungry foreigners deeper into the underground labyrinth in search of a sealed-up bunker, he regales them with stories of bizarre wartime experiments and Nazi flying saucers; for anyone familiar with Berlin's history, the pleasing twist is that what they eventually discover reveals the real horror to lie in the once-divided city's more recent past, a product of the paranoid mindset that gripped the DDR from its leaders down to its minor functionaries. Anyone who's read Anna Funder's brilliant *Stasiland* will enjoy some neat references here (the psycho-killer as U-bahn ticket inspector, for instance), and while the film follows a tried-and-tested genre formula, it's these more local cultural specifics that lift it above the merely workaday.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

STANDARD HORROR LIFTED BY SOME NICE LOCAL TOUCHES 7

SHORTS

GRINDHOUSE TRAILER CLASSICS 3

(Nucleus Films, £15.99)

GRINDHOUSE 3
GRINDHOUSE

Sadly, it seems this series is running out of steam. Sure, there are a few gems: *Nazi Love Camp 27*, *The Story of the Rape Squad* and *Vampires Night Orgy* deliver on their titles, while *Schizoid* kindly warns the viewer that it's "not recommended for people with schizophrenic tendencies"; way to ruin my night out! There are numerous cash-ins on the telly of the day, such as *Charlie's Angels* (*Superchick* and *Police Women*), ninja movies and simply piss-poor B-movies (the brilliantly named *The Lady in a Car with Glasses and a Gun*), none of which owe anything much to Grindhouse as a genre and merely serve to remind us that a great many actors – Jack Palance, Peter Fonda, Stanley Baker and Ollie Reed among them – made a lot of terrible films. **TW 5/10**

MIDNIGHT

(Arrow Films, £15.99)

Although a beast of the Eighties, John Russo's *Midnight* feels like it was made 20 years earlier, with its tale of runaways and Manson-family types, all shot with the graininess of vintage porn. The acting is uniformly dreadful, while the soundtrack of archaic sequencers and sped-up tapes makes the worst mistakes of the 1960s seem less indulgent; even those who wallow in the bowels of electronica (TG/Non) will balk at this. Obvious references are *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (without its nerve-jangling insanity) and *Night of the Living Dead* (without zombies, just cretins; more Oddbod than Leatherface). One of the worst films I've ever seen. **TW 1/10**

PERFECT SENSE

(Entertainment One, £12.99)

PERFECT SENSE

Houston, we have an SOS. Severe Olfactory Syndrome is what epidemiologist Susan (Eva Green) is calling a new virus that's sweeping through the world, robbing inhabitants of their senses. In the midst of the pandemonium, she meets and falls in love with a chef (Ewan McGregor) and the two of them proceed to communicate to us the meaning of life: let sensory perception give way to physical expression, because all you need is love. Make sense? Not entirely, perhaps. But, that aside, this love story is unique and undeniably intriguing. While the world would surely have benefited from Green spending more time in the lab, the relationship between the lovers is captivating enough to get us through this lyrical journey without thinking too much about the end of the world.
Fohnjang Ghebdinga 7/10

FACES IN THE CROWD

(Metrodome, £11.99/£15.99)

MILLA JOVOVICH
FACES IN THE CROWD

Billed as a thriller, this tame beast is anything but. Diagnosed with prosopagnosia (the inability to recognise faces) following a failed attack by a serial killer, poor Mila Jovovich has a hard time of it trying to put the pieces of her life back together and catch a killer who knows she can no longer ID him. Now, I wouldn't wish face blindness on anyone, but the subject matter sure does make for a tedious film. Jovovich is watchable, but the dialogue is cheesy, the effects amateurish and the juvenile *I Know What You Did Last Summer* slasher plot is underdeveloped and needs a lot more work. To sum up by quoting the script, "This face-blind shit… I can't deal with it anymore." **FG 4/10**

Binary Domain

Xbox/PS3 £49.99, Sega/Yakuza Studio

Somebody get a forklift in here, we've got some crates to move!

First impressions (fighting through warehouses and corridors full of crates) can be deceiving. *Binary Domain* is Sega's latest release from developers Toshihiro Nagoshi and Yakuza Studio. It's a third-person, squad-based game set in 2080, that puts you in the boots of Dan 'Survivor' Marshal, a cocksure Yankee who is teamed up with six racial stereotypes on a mission to find the head of a maverick robotics company in a sleek, dual-layer Tokyo of the future.

It's a *Blade Runner*/*Battlestar Galactica*/*Ghost in the Shell* sort of story: a Japanese robotics firm is suspected of creating outlawed 'Hollow Children' – robots that think they're human. And while they look just as human as you and me, they have a nasty habit of infiltrating clandestine groups and/or killing people just when you felt you were getting to know them. Your role is to infiltrate Tokyo with your 'Rust Crew' and bring their creator to justice.

This plot, and the way it develops, is one of the reasons to play this game. Told through an impressively tight, well-written script and via effective cut scenes, it explores the twin themes of loss of identity and a society in which you can no longer tell if the person standing next to you is human or not. The importance of trust is also a major element in the way the game is played. Your teammates will chat during missions and require answers to personal problems and questions about tactics that, depending on your answer, will affect how they trust you and in turn, their effectiveness in combat. In a nice touch, these responses can be spoken though your Xbox headset and the voice recognition accuracy (which was good) can be tweaked in settings.

Gameplay can be a little inconsistent and, in general, level design suffers from too many old school corridors and warehouses full of those damned crates to crouch behind. There are multiple slowly-descending-lift-while-we-stand-our-ground-till-it arrives-sequences, a mine kart ride, and little context to the grenades often found by office doors or ammo-dispensing machines in sewer pipes.

The early levels offer bland colours and environments, but enemy encounters are fun and the combat works well. Later levels fare better as the environments gain more colour and detail. Chapters are also interspersed with some excellent fast-paced vehicle chases (including one around a Tokyo that looks very similar to the opening of *Akira*) and high octane assault missions that do a great job of breaking up the slightly more mundane levels. It offers standard *Gears of War*-style multiplayer modes as well, although the maps can feel basic.

Sound design is good; music is uninspired, but does the job. Special mention must go to the superb voice acting, though, which delivers the clever script most effectively. Japanese games have not always had the best luck with convincing western voice work, but the cast of *Binary Domain* manages to convey camaraderie and emotion more convincingly than do most games out there.

The more I played, the more I enjoyed. Its foundations are the formula set out by the *Gears of War* series, but it builds on that with a gripping plot, characters for whom you genuinely care and combat missions that develop from initially rather uninspired to bold action sequences and dynamic events that depend on just which of the Rust Crew you choose to have at your side. Should you play *Binary Domain*? It's either a yes or a no.

Choose yes.

JP Coxon

Fortean Times Verdict

GRIPPING DYSTOPIAN STUFF THAT GETS BETTER AS IT PROGRESSES **8**

Serious Sam 3: BFE

PC £24.99, Devolver Digital/Croteam

Yes, it's another classic FPS reinvented, now with an updated gaming engine and graphics and a storyline that touches upon some really important issues to get those bedroom-gaming proto-postal teenagers back on the right moral track via its subtly delivered humanistic message. Right? Let's get serious here.

Wrong. Let's not. *Serious Sam 3: BFE* (Before First Encounter) is a game in which for reasons that don't matter one bit, you get to blow up the Sphinx. It wears its muscle-stretched T-shirt with pride. No contemporary skinny latte cutaway hero angst here, just straight-ahead assault-rifling, machine-gunning, shot-gunning, mini-gunning, rocket-launching, cannon-firing testosterone-fuelled death visited upon hordes of assorted monsters. The bare-chested headless kamikaze men are back. And those galumphing gnaars (don't waste your ammo on them: bludgeon the buggers with your sledgehammer).

If you are familiar with *Serious Sam* outings of old, more online options – among them a 16-player full campaign and 4-player split screen modes – constitute the new. The single player is unabashedly un-reinvented in its macho shithead arcade-style madness. Croteam have added some killing enhancements and a couple of formidable new foes and countless in-game achievements to collect, to boot. But survival here depends on little more than your reflex blasting ability and the knack of switching weapons as swiftly as possible while running backwards before you die. And die. And die… overwhelmed by hordes of oncoming horrors. 'Save' is a good word, it's a healthy word. But it is frequently a forgotten word as the wave of nasties charging your way is followed by another – and another. The script is slick, the plot irrelevant, the environments as good as they have ever been, mostly of the devastated urban sprawl and desert-heavy kind. But you know, with a wide gonzo grin, that when you come upon yet another vast, sparse vista or spacious temple complex, it is about to become a massive killing ground. This riotous shoot-'em-up belongs to a time when Arnie films ruled the world.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

SERIOUSLY: THIS REALLY IS AN AWFUL LOT OF FUN **8**

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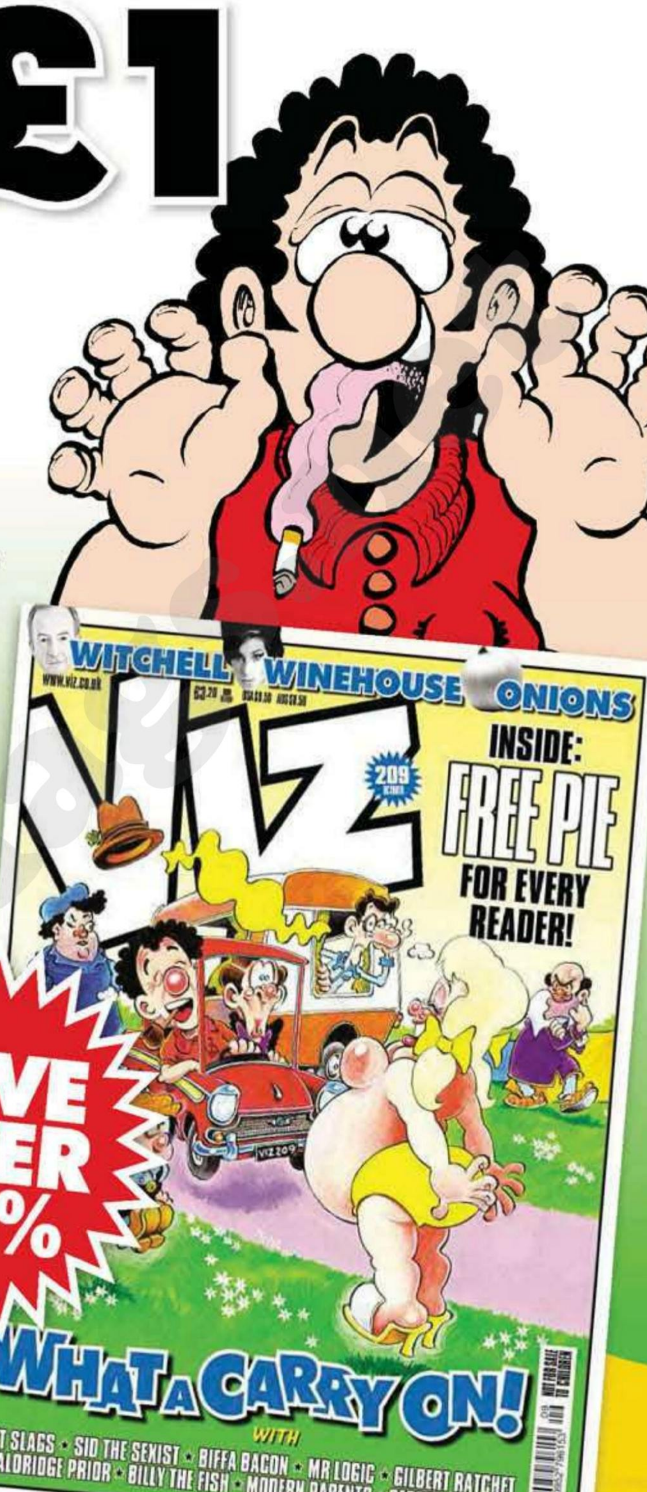
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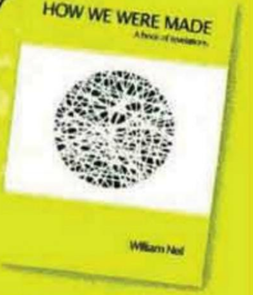

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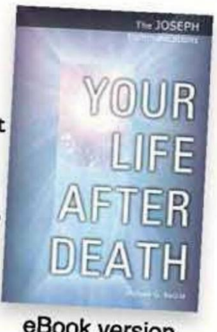

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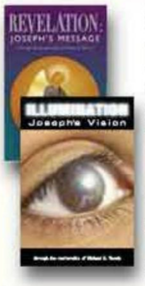

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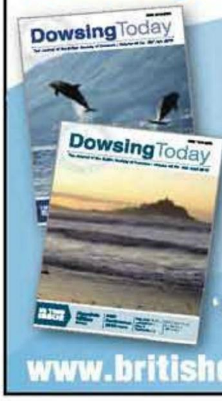

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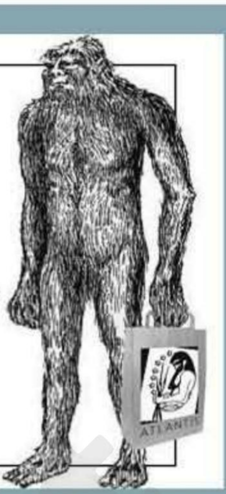

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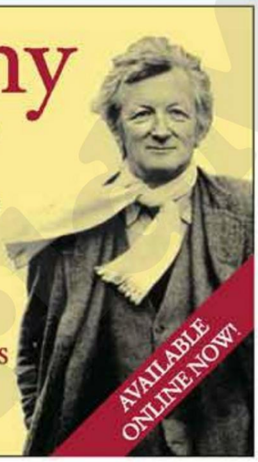
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Dear FT...

letters

Lightning image

A poster on the web fansite that I frequent described a visit to a haunted house in Radford, Virginia. The house is called variously Ingals/Ingalls Tower, Ingles Castle or La Rivière Castle. She described a mirror with the 'image' of a woman holding a cat burned into the silver nitrate backing by a lightning flash. According to a report by Matt Gentry in the *Roanoke Times* (25 April 2008), the woman was a widow called Annie Bass, who in the summer of 1893 had come to visit her nephew, Captain Billy Ingles, in La Rivière. She often stayed for months at a time. According to one version of the tale, she was looking for her cat and found it perched on the mantelpiece in the library, admiring itself in the mirror when lightning flashed outside. The mirror's silver nitrate backing acted like a photographic plate, capturing an image of Bass and her cat in the glass. Seeing it clearly requires looking almost across the mirror rather than directly into it. Neither Bass nor her cat was injured, and no one noticed the image for several days.

In succeeding years, the story has been embroidered – in one version the woman is trapped in the mirror, and in another the woman and the cat haunt the house. Is this a familiar yarn among forteans?

For a photo of the mirror, see http://bit.ly/yBKfNV (roanoke.com).

Diana Lyons
Sheppscar, West Yorkshire

Editor's note: In the 19th century, the transfer of images onto bodies and objects by lightning was given a name – keranography – but its validity is still disputed. See "Lightning pictures" in *The Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena* (2007) by John Michell & Bob Rickard, pp285–86; **FT261:48–51**.

An early cassowary?

I was fascinated by the "theropod dinosaur" Andrew May discovered in "The Temptation of St Anthony" painted by Marten de Vos [**FT281:67**]. To me it looks more like a large ratite bird, especially a cassowary [native to New Guinea and nearby islands]. The droop of the heavy rear end, the carriage of the neck, and especially the long thin 'ears', which could have been inspired by the dangling neck wattles of a cassowary – why not?

True, the first confirmed sighting of a cassowary by a European was in 1606, three years after de Vos died – but sailors have always liked exotic pets, and maybe an early cassowary could have sneaked under the radar, so to speak.

Leslie Vinson
Tucson, Arizona

Lying flat

Regarding the Mythconception that "people were much smaller in the old days" [**FT284:21**]: that was a phrase I often heard when I worked as a room guide at Montacute House, Somerset, last year. The comment normally came up in the context of beds dating from the Tudor and Stuart periods: "Weren't they short? Even I couldn't lie down flat in that." What I was told by the house staff, however, is that in those days "lying down flat" was closely associated with being dead, and people normally slept in a semi-sitting posture, with their feet at the end of the bed and their head raised up against the headboard (hence the name, if you think about it).

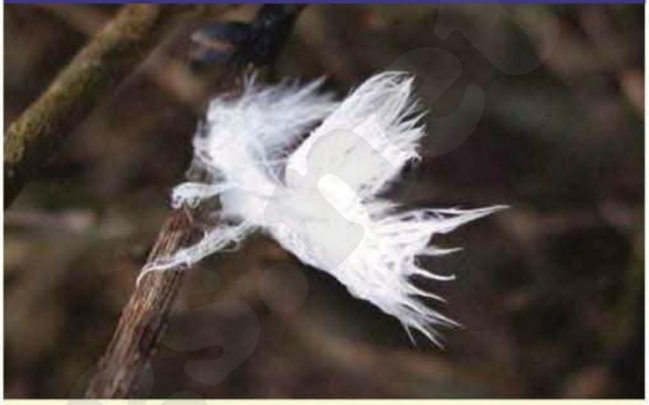
Andrew May
Crewkerne, Somerset

Ryan Dunn, R.I.P.

Regarding the tree image in Simulacra Corner [**FT284:69**]: I see less of a resemblance to Jesus than to Ryan Dunn, the cast member of *Jackass* who was killed in a car accident on 20 June 2011. This makes the image even more fortean because of the circumstances surrounding his death: while under the influence of alcohol and behind the wheel of a Porsche GT3 R/S he struck a stand of trees at high speed, resulting in an explosion that killed both himself and his passenger.

Amy Young
Norfolk, Virginia

Simulacra Corner



Derek Wood took this 'fairy' photograph in February 2010 in the grounds of Hedingham Castle, Essex. "I think it was a snag of plant 'cotton' or sheep's wool," he said, "but I dare say Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would have championed it as something far more fey."

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – please tell us your postal address and we'll send you an exclusive **Fortean Times** gift.*

Death tunnel

Peter Hassall's two-part survey of anomalous phenomena being caught accidentally on film [**FT283:34–39, 284:44–47**] reminded me of a film a friend and I rented a few years ago. This was *Death Tunnel* [2005/6], co-written by Philip Adrian Booth (who also directed) and Christopher Saint Booth; starring Melanie Lewis, Steffany Huckaby, Gary Wolf and Jason Lasater amongst others, it uses the history and mythology of Waverly Hills Sanatorium in Kentucky.

Like several other films, *Death Tunnel* was also shot at Waverly Hills; however, unlike those (as far as I'm aware), according to the DVD's extras, numerous images of ghosts and other phenomena were recorded during shooting. These recordings are included in the extras and allegedly show shadowy figures and menacing faces, poltergeist activity, and EVPs: the latter actually being included on the film soundtrack to add to the eeriness factor. Obviously, I've got no way of knowing if this is any more than urban legend and a good PR stunt, and I can't help but be a bit suspicious; I'd be interested to know the opinions of anyone else who's seen it. It's not a bad film, but the extras are rather more interesting!

Louise Bath
Halesowen, West Midlands

A sign of thunder?

A couple of things occurred to me after reading "A UFO in the Year 1561" [**FT283:40–42**]. First off, the cannons probably represent thunder (or a sonic boom?) – and so does the little drummer boy in the Hatford meteorite woodcut. Secondly, what on earth is the black spear-thing flying over Nuremberg?

Bobby Zodiac
Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire

letters

Supernatural

Martin Jenkins expressed his belief that the supernatural exists based up on the weight of numbers of those that believe in it [**FT285:67**]. He also states that the scientific method declares that the supernatural doesn't exist because it hasn't been explained by the scientific method. The problem is that many supposedly supernatural phenomena *have* been explained by science. After all, didn't our ancestors believe, for example, that volcanoes, lightning and the Sun were manifestations of supernatural power? And yet these things are fairly well understood by science these days.

That being the case, isn't the real issue to do with the way we define phenomena, not what they actually are and how they work? I don't believe in the supernatural for semantic reasons; if something exists it does so within the framework of nature, not above or outside of it – neither "super-" nor "para-".

I know from my own experience, for example, that ghosts (or the phenomena to which we give that name) exist – but there must be some kind of principle behind them, some set of rules that makes them happen, or they simply wouldn't happen! That makes them sound perfectly natural to me, and saying science hasn't explained them yet isn't the same as saying it can't. We just have to redefine what we mean by words like "science" and "nature", something that the scientific method allows for, and most other dogmata do not.

Barry Metcalf
By email

Martin Jenkins speculates that if William of Occam were asked why people believe in the supernatural, he would have said "because it exists". More probably, he would have said (in Latin) "because its existence is a necessary truth".

Occam was a 14th-century schoolman, who studied the works of other schoolmen to systematise the rules of scholastic argument. He is best remembered for "Occam's razor", but he also wrote: "A necessary truth follows from anything, for instance I am white, therefore God is triune" (*Summa logicæ*, 1326, translated by Philotheus Boehner 1955). What he meant by "a necessary truth" was a proposition in which belief was needed in order to escape eternal damnation, and proclamation of disbelief would get you denounced as a heretic.

The difference between mundane and sacred beliefs becomes apparent in cases of doubt. Mundane beliefs may be confirmed or refuted by reference to available data, while sacred beliefs may be enforced by threats of punishment.

Donald Rooum
London

Martin Jenkins is so right! Many people come up with the meme "I shall only believe when I experience it myself" – which is nonsense, because that would imply we could dismiss every experiencer as a liar or an attention-seeker unless/until we have the same experience. When it happens to us, this will be nothing but another subjective experience, which others can deny or debunk with the same 'validity' with which we ourselves doubted the experience of others. The world is full of data we are not in a position to validate, as Mr Jenkins says, but we nevertheless take for granted, and rightly so (most of the time). It's the basis of our education. Obvious, right? But for the paranormal, or the supernatural, obvious doesn't count, obviously.

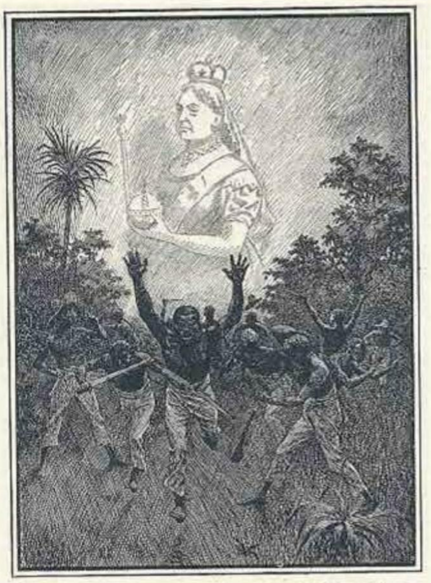
Another strange thing that bugs me is the ease with which conjurers or other debunking folk claim cheating in every case they 'investigate' – especially when it concerns rather complex phenomena with psychics, healing, telekinesis, poltergeists, you name it. There are many events of high strangeness that are credible not only because there is a pattern of similar events, but because the experiencer probably never heard of such a thing before. The disgruntled teenager in whose house a poltergeist performs has most likely never heard of the specifics of such a haunting, nor has his family.

Loes Modderman
Nijmegen, Netherlands

The Parson's Victory

A precursor to the 'Angels of Mons' legend – or perhaps just one part of an ongoing mythology of 'battlefield visions' stretching back hundreds of years – exists in a short fictional story by JGB Lynch that appeared in the March 1908 issue of *Captain Magazine*. 'The Parson's Victory' tells the story of a British adventurer who, while visiting the cottage of a Jamaican plantation owner, finds himself surrounded by hostile natives alongside several unarmed servants and a local parson. Inside the cottage, outnumbered and facing imminent death at the hands of the natives, the quick-thinking parson suddenly hits upon the idea of projecting a huge image of Queen Victoria into the sky behind the natives with a magic lantern that he has with him; his plan works and the natives retreat into the jungle in a state of blind fear and panic (a scene created here by the illustrator John de Walton).

Although the setting is not strictly a battlefield, all the elements that appear in various versions of the Mons Legend (including Arthur Machen's 'The Bowmen' and other rumoured World War I battlefield visions) are there: a group of beleaguered, outnumbered individuals on the point of impending disaster; underlying themes of patriotism and xenophobia and the ghostly aerial appearance of the image of a national figurehead (St George, Joan of Arc, General Skobeleff, Queen Victoria) which frightens the enemy and galvanises the resolve of the underdog. The parson's use of a magic lantern also closely parallels rumours that Germans utilised projectors to cast images onto clouds to unsettle and terrify the British troops.



THERE, LIKE A MIGHTY PAINTING IN THE MIDST OF CLOUDS, STOOD A HUGE REPRESENTATION OF THE QUEEN.

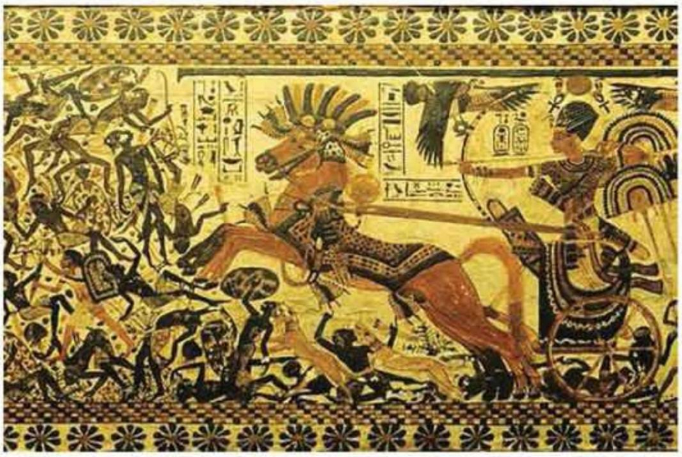
Editor's note: Foe the latter, see testimony of Col Friedrich Herzenwirth of the Imperial German Intelligence Service, *Daily News*, 17+18 Feb 1930, in *Man Bites Man*, Penguin 1981, edited by Paul Sieveking, p98.

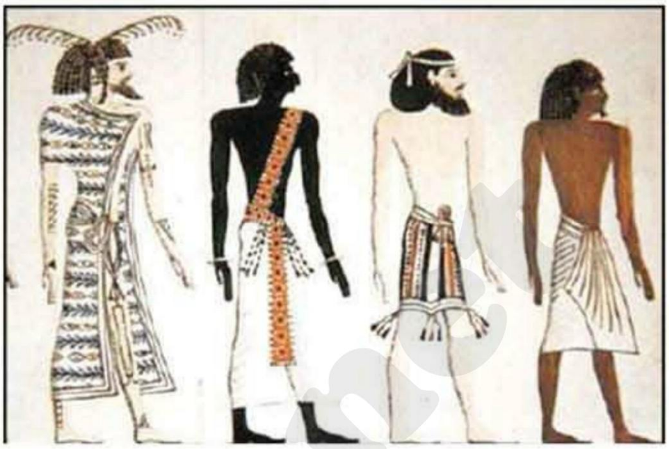
Alistair Moffatt
Halifax, West Yorkshire

The late comedian Red Skelton delighted in projecting pornographic films onto the side of a building next to a busy highway in Los Angeles late at night. Skelton had a lens used by drive-in movie theatre projectionists to beam the 'blue movies' a distance of a quarter of a mile from his apartment. Only after several accidents and a police investigation did his nocturnal hobby come to an end.

Can you imagine the sensation it would create if someone projected movie monster images onto a dense fog?

Greg May
By email





ABOVE LEFT: Egyptian wall painting showing Tutankhamen defeating Nubians. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Figures from Egyptian art – Syrian, Nubian, Libyan, and Egyptian.

Afrocentrism

Regarding Noel Rooney's review of *Black Genesis, The Prehistoric Origins Of Ancient Egypt* by Bouval and Brophy [**FT283:60**]: I can't comment on the book directly, but I can on the tone of the review, which is decidedly Afrocentrist. Firstly, Mr Rooney seems surprised that archæologists haven't accepted that Egypt was a black African empire, and even suggests that many historians hold the belief that Egypt was a 'European' civilisation, which is a theory new to me.

By definition, if Southern Africa was the home of *Homo sapiens*, then by logic we are all descended from Africans now. However, all the evidence suggests that the first wave of humans migrating north through Africa were more of a common ancestor to all the modern peoples who later developed. They were pastoral hunter-gatherers who came from the south and migrated north and then out of Africa. Obviously, its location and history makes Egypt an 'African' civilisation, but African doesn't necessarily mean black African (if that term implies sub-Saharan African appearance), and the fact that Greeks and Romans often described Berbers as 'black Libyans' (where there is still a large Berber community today), gives a strong clue as to what they were referring to.

All the evidence indicates that historical Egypt was populated by close relatives of modern Berbers (such as the Copts of Egypt?), whereas the Nubians to the south (who conquered upper Egypt for a period of time) were of a more black African descent (Southern Sudanese). And in fact they have left us their equivalent of photographs in the form of mummies or hieroglyphics, which patently do not portray Egyptians as sub-Saharan Africans, and maybe even more directly, the coffin paintings that were popular during the Greek and Roman periods.

Though idealised portraits, these images obviously depict a set of faces that, while dark, are still Mediterranean – even the 'African' faces are more akin to Berbers. I might add that these 'African' theories seriously offend Egyptians; for example, according to Dr Zahi Hawass, the former Minister of State for Antiquities Affairs, "Tutankhamen was not black, and the portrayal of ancient Egyptian civilisation as black has no element of truth to it."

Sub-Saharan Africa has had civilisations of its own (including The Kush aka Nubian Kingdom, circa 1100 BC – AD 300).

Andy Kelly
By email

Noel Rooney responds: I will cheerfully admit to over-egging the Afrocentrist point of view in my review; I did this largely because that view is virtually invisible in most work dealing with ancient Egypt. A couple of points, however: first, I describe ancient Egypt as an 'African empire', which it plainly was; and further, that it saw itself as connected to other African cultures. Second, Mr Kelly's point about the Berbers speaks to my argument as much as his; there are and have always been black Libyans; today you will find people called 'black Berbers' and yes, they are black people. Herodotus describes the Egyptians as black, like the Ethiopians, and the Nubians; there must be some reason for him to say this.

Egyptian iconography is not representational as we understand the term; and I'm not convinced that the Hellenised funeral portraiture of later Egypt tells us anything about its early history. I am also unconvinced by any argument that is at pains to separate Sub-Saharan peoples from other Africans; such theorising is redolent of prejudice, even if it is not consciously aiming at it.

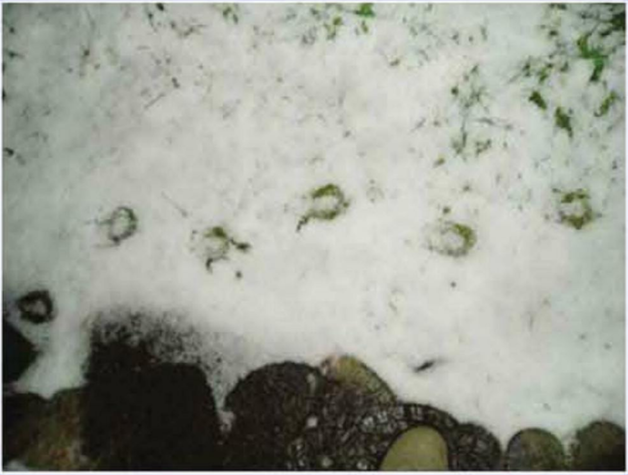
Live rails

In response to Chris Aicken's question about live rails [**FT285:67**], regarding the photo of people lying on railway lines [**FT280:10**] – yes, the train has a pantograph on top and is clearly picking up power from the overhead live wires. However, it's a common misconception that the rails below are therefore safe. The current has to have a return path from the train to the source of the power, and there is a massive current flowing in from the overhead wires, through the motor, and along the rails to the nearest earthing points before using the earth itself as the final link back to the power source. You can see the rails are sitting on concrete sleepers, which will insulate the rails to an extent, so at regular intervals they will have connections to large metal rods in the earth to complete the circuit. As the train approaches, there will be a large current flowing through the rails between the train and the earthing points of the rails. This will be strong enough to induce a smaller current in the parallel rails that the people are photographed lying on, and give them their tingling but non-fatal shocks. I strongly suspect if they'd been lying on the rails with the train on, they'd have been killed by electrocution shortly before being mutilated by the train itself. I suppose if you're that poor and can't afford a TENS machine, this is a good substitute, but I wouldn't like to try it!

Gary Smith, B.Eng., MIET.
By email

O.B.E. WAN KENOBI

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY



Snowprints

These apparent footprints turned up in my garden in Cumnock, Ayrshire, after light snow on 24 February 2010. They look like miniature horseshoe prints, and were about 2½ to 3in (6.3–7.6cm) wide and 8in (20cm) apart. My boot is visible in the bottom of the photograph to give scale. The prints stretched from my back door then crossed over a bush without compressing the foliage. They travelled into a neighbour's garden, but I don't know how much further they went. My garden is enclosed by a 6ft (1.8m) fence on two sides and a 3ft (90cm) fence on the other. At no point in the trail did any of the prints deviate from the spacing seen in the photograph. All were exactly the same. Can anyone offer an explanation?

Craig — *Cumnock, Ayrshire*

Loch Ness submarines

THE SUBS OF LOCH NESS

A PLESIOSAUR HEAD WAS ATTACHED TO A TOY SUBMARINE

It was interesting to read Jeffrey Vallance's concise history of submarine navigation, both factual and fictitious, in Loch Ness [**FT284:40–43**], but he is guilty of a major omission: the little-known role of the Royal Navy. It must be said in his defence, however, that I only learned of this from a rather unlikely source – my late father's subscription to that venerable weekly journal of the huntin', shootin' and fishin' set, *The Field*.

One week in the early 1970s, my eye was caught by an oddball item on the letters page: a picture of a Royal Navy submarine passing through a canal lock. It was a conventionally-powered patrol submarine, which the caption reported had been photographed while passing through the Caledonian Canal, and specifically stated that she was headed for Loch Ness, not passing through *en route* from the North Sea to the west coast of Scotland. Remarking that the submarine (the name of which I cannot recall, but I'm certain was a unit of the Oberon-class) would take part in some unspecified exercise in the Loch, the brief text closed with a routinely flippant reference to the indigenous monster.

Nessie aside, however, the fact that a Royal Navy submarine was undertaking a classified, if not actually clandestine, operation in the waters of Loch Ness is itself of some fortean significance. What was the Ministry of Defence up to? Given the political furore caused by Dan Taylor's Viperfish expedition and the trials of prototype Vickers Pisces in 1969, with questions being asked in the House of Lords as to why neither local authority had been asked permission for the dives, one would have thought a full-sized warship prowling the depths of the Loch might have raised a few regional hackles.

Then there were the environmental and safety factors. Quite apart from the risk of oil leaks or pollution from the flushing of the submarine ballast tanks (not to mention the toilets), there was the potential effect of the submarine's sonar on life in the Loch, both extant and mythical. Nor were these the safest waters to operate a submarine – apart from the risk of collision with small boats, the Oberon-class were ocean-going vessels. The only full-sized naval submarines designed to operate in freshwater were a group of Finnish boats built between the world wars to patrol the then frontier with the former USSR, which at several points in Karelia crossed large lakes. Freshwater is much less dense than seawater, and the crew of a large submarine (which, as a contemporary Royal Navy recruiting poster remarked, had to be manœuvred with a precision comparable to driving a Mini car to a tolerance of a quarter-of-an-inch) operating in Loch Ness would have to be particularly careful regarding the boat's trim, with especial regard to operating the ballast tanks.

So, what was a Royal Navy hunter-killer doing prowling the waters of Loch Ness four decades ago? Certainly not looking for *Nessiteras rhombopteryx*, and even less likely to be hunting a Russian submarine, although this was only a few years before the Norwegian and Swedish navies began detecting underwater intruders in their own waters [**FT42:7, 48:16, 49:63, 50:72, 51:26–30, 60:64, 61:32, 67:50, 82:32**]. Doubtless, the official answer would be testing new sonar equipment in deep water, but where its operational parameters could be established without the interference of salinity layers. Or, possibly, it involved training special forces in operating from submerged submarines. A few years later, there was a tragic accident involving the death of Special Boat Service commandoes from a similar submarine off the Hebrides.

Or maybe it wasn't just coincidence that this little-known exercise occurred so soon before the Scandinavian navies found their waters invaded. Extreme conspiracy theorists would, no doubt, claim that this was the Royal Navy practising its clandestine programme of Cold War provocation, in readiness to fake "Red Navy" incursions in the Baltic and the Barents Sea, to heighten regional tensions. Or perhaps, and possibly more likely, this was NATO examining the problems of hunting hostile boats in just such waters, like a Norwegian fjord, where sonar could be blinded by conflicting echoes from the narrow sides, and trying to establish countermeasures to such an attack.

Or perhaps it was something else instead. Maybe one day we'll know – or maybe not – but quite frankly, it's as tantalising a mystery as any the Loch has offered before.

Hadrian Jeffs
Long Stratton, Norfolk

Believing is seeing

While muttering to myself today, I was going to say, "I'll believe that when I see it", but it came out as "I'll see that when I believe it". Bing! There you have, in a few short words, the opposing worldviews of the sceptic and the credulous. I need hardly tell you that the world-view of the fortean falls somewhere between the two. I've tried to express it in a similar short sentence, but without success.

A propos this, here is a true story: The pride of the Norwegian city of Bergen is the tall ship *Statsraad Lemkuhl* (Cabinet Minister Lemkuhl). Some years ago, as an April Fool joke, a local radio station broadcast the news that the ship had sunk. A friend of mine was sitting in a bar when a frantic man burst in, shouting: "The *Statsraad* has sunk!". My friend told him, "Calm down, man – it's only an April Fool!" – but the man replied, "Don't you believe a word of it… I saw it myself!"

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

it happened to me...

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Haunted mirror

My friend Anna was working as an English teacher in Budapest between 1992 and 1994. She had a flat in a fairly old apartment block, perhaps from the 1930s. The furniture looked as if it had been there since the place was built – very solid wooden stuff. In her dining room there was a large antique mirror, and she swears blind that at certain times of the day, usually between two and four in the afternoon, anyone looking in it would see not just themselves, but a group of six or seven soldiers in the room with them. According to Anna, the soldiers were wearing "First World War-type uniforms" and had old rifles. The mirror always showed the same thing: the men were relaxing around a table, eating and chatting, while one of them looked anxiously out of the window. And that was it.

Sadly, the mirror got broken by a visitor to the flat who got freaked out by what he saw. Bugger.

Paul Gallantry
By email

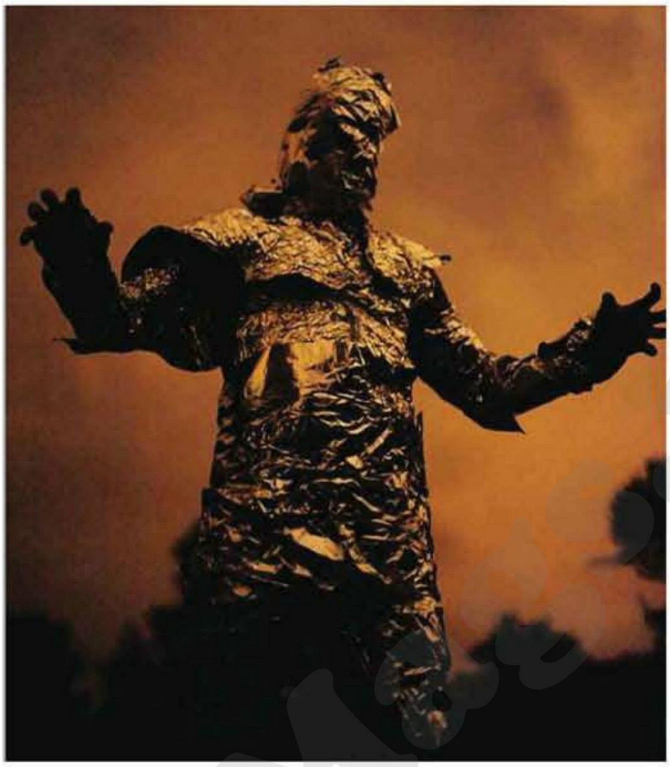
Woman in the mirror

When I was about 17, my mates and I had a Ouija session for a laugh. It may be that what followed was directly caused by this, or possibly it was just prompted by our very spooked state of mind.

Two of us had identical dreams the next night. We thought this curious enough, but the real twist was the content. We each dreamed that we woke up in the night, sat up in bed and looked in the mirror on the wall directly opposite the bed (which my mate really had in his room, but I didn't). In the mirror, we each saw our own face, and standing behind, as if looking over our shoulders into the mirror, a woman dressed in an exquisite silk kimono, but with a horribly burned face. It would have been impossible for anyone to stand behind us like this, with each of us sitting up in bed – a bed with its head against the wall.

The next morning I took all the mirrors out of my room. After that I was rather uneasy about mirrors in bedrooms for about 10 years.

Seversm
By email



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Neighbour's goodbye

During the late 1990s, I lived in a block of 44 flats in Malaga, Spain. The 44 families shared three lifts, so it was very common to meet neighbours while waiting for the lift.

One night, I dreamed I met one of the neighbours in the entrance to the block. He was a kind, elderly gentleman whom I hadn't seen in a few days. In my dream I asked him how he was. He explained to me that he had been very ill and had needed to stay at home for a while, but that today he was finally feeling much better and had decided to go for a walk.

The following morning I froze as soon as I entered the lift. There was a note stuck in the mirror informing the community that this elderly gentleman had passed away the night before – just before I dreamed of him.

MJ
Bristol

Tinfoil giant

A friend and I had an unusual experience in June 2003 in West Sussex. The time was about 10pm; almost dark, but with some twilight remaining.

We were coming back from another friend's house along a section of country road we had both driven many times. My friend was driving and I sat in the passenger seat. We slowed for a tight left-hand bend and as we turned, driving at this point at about 20mph (32km/h), the headlights caught someone moving amongst the trees on the outside of the bend. I was about to say "Did you see that?" but my friend had already confirmed he had with an expletive. We only caught a brief glimpse of the 'person', but it was one of the most bizarre things I've ever seen, for two reasons: first and foremost, his size, which was staggering and, indeed, what initially made us catch our breath. He was at least 8ft (2.4m) tall, and while from our brief observation it was hard to make an accurate estimate, he was clearly larger than an ordinary human.

It was all too fleeting to notice any particular facial features; he was virtually facing us, but looking slightly down as the lights shone on him, and seemed to be stepping sideways over something in the undergrowth, as his right leg was moving upwards and sideways. The other very unusual aspect was that the headlights reflected a large glare off his clothing, which seemed to be shiny, almost like foil.

We confirmed to each other what we had witnessed and, after a couple of moments of indecision, my friend reversed back to the bend and pointed the headlights into the trees approximately where we had seen the figure. All appeared normal. I even got out of the car and called (to my friend's fervent objection; I'd had some Dutch courage that night, but he was sober!), but no one seemed to be moving about in the woods.

I don't believe in extraterrestrials, so I've ruled out anything like that, and being a fairly practical-minded person I've come up with various explanations, such as kids mucking about. But the problem of size keeps coming back – I even checked the Internet the following week to see if 8ft-plus people were more common than I'd thought, rationalising that it was some weirdo in a foil suit. It certainly wasn't any kind of model, because it was definitely animated. I'm still puzzling over it.

Name withheld
By email 2003

The harlequin

About 40 years ago, I lived near a very small city in upstate New York. For about two years, whenever I was on the main street of the city, I would see a person dressed like a harlequin. This was very strange for such a conservative city, although, to my recollection, no one else on the street showed any reaction.

As a kid, I recall walking past this person (or whatever it was) and getting the most uncomfortable feeling from her – I think it was a 'her', since 'she' was dressed in dirty pink satin and stripes and wore filthy ballet slippers. Her face was also painted up like a harlequin. Her behaviour was odd, too. She never blinked, but just stared vacantly into the distance. The other weird thing that used to frighten me was that I'd turn to get another look at her and she would suddenly be on the other side of the street. She was always dressed the same way, always behaving the same way, in all weather. She acted strangely enough for me to be afraid that she would even look at me. I still get chills when I think of 'her' now.

Dave Tiger
By email

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

11. THE MYSTERY OF SARAH DUCKETT

In late September 1881, farmer Bill Roberts was walking home to his house near Church Stretton, Shropshire. It was a dark and cloudy night, the moon flitting in and out of the clouds being the only light for the sturdy countryman making his way along the narrow roads and paths. Suddenly, he saw the figure of a woman dressed in white standing nearby. He recognised her as Sarah Duckett, a spinster who had disappeared from the neighbourhood several years earlier. He was about to speak to her when she slowly glided away from him, and disappeared down the shaft of an old mine called the Copper Hole. Bill Roberts had seen a ghost!

Having received the fright of his life, Roberts alerted all his friends and neighbours. Surely there must have been foul play when Sarah Duckett disappeared, he reasoned, and surely her dead body must have been dumped down the Copper Hole. It turned out that Sarah Duckett had gone to Australia about seven years earlier, returning 18 months later. Local gossip was that, by one stratagem or other, she had earned a good deal of money down in the Antipodes. The last time Sarah Duckett had been seen alive was at the Church Stretton railway station, whence she had been walking up Hazel Road. The murderer must have been waiting for her there, Roberts deduced. He and his friends decided to empty the Copper Hole, find Sarah Duckett's skeleton, and thus lay the ghost to rest.

There was widespread newspaper interest in the Shropshire Ghost and the excavation of the Copper Hole. *Reynolds's Newspaper* of 9 October reported that, every day, the old mine was visited by hundreds of people. The place resembled a country fair. Three respectable ladies had recently seen the ghost, and identified it as Sarah Duckett. Roberts was leading a team of 20 people, and they were making good progress emptying the deep mine shaft. Britain's number one sensational newspaper, the *Illustrated Police News*, could not, of course, resist this remarkable ghost story. Carrying an illustration of how the Shropshire Ghost frightened Bill Roberts, it reported that all the locals were convinced that Sarah Duckett had been murdered, and that the solution lay at the bottom of the now nearly empty mine shaft.

When, after more than three weeks of hard work, the Copper Hole had been excavated without any human remains being found, a local dignitary received an anonymous letter:

"You will fail to find the body of Sarah Duckett in the Copper Hole; look in the cellar of the Toll Bar, examine the part nearest the road, in the left-hand corner."

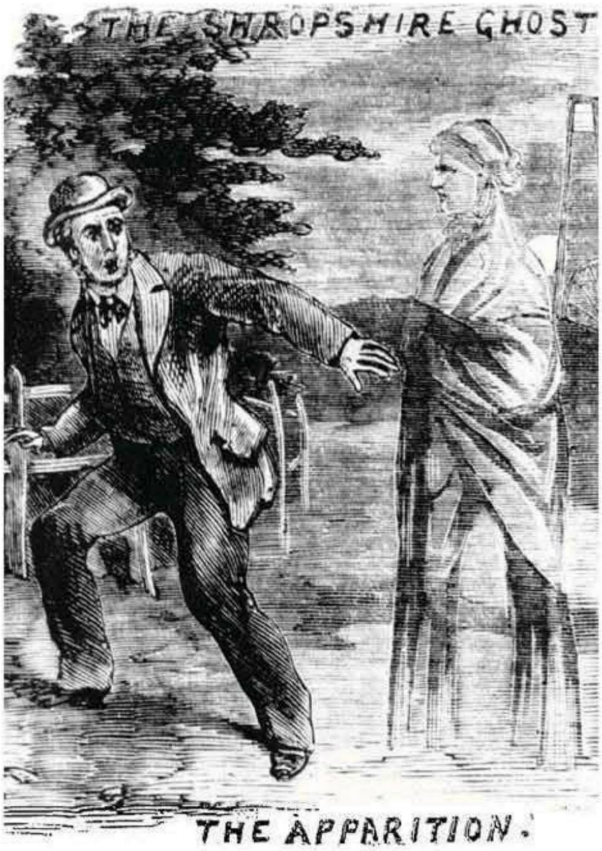
Bill Roberts and his workforce promptly followed this recommendation, but after they had been digging for a week, another anonymous letter was received, purportedly from Sarah Duckett herself! She was amazed to see all this fuss on her behalf, she wrote, since she was happily married, and living in Martley, Worcestershire. Roberts and his men put down their spades with consternation, but inquiries demonstrated that the letter was a hoax. The workmen renewed their digging, egged on by several more sightings of the ghost.

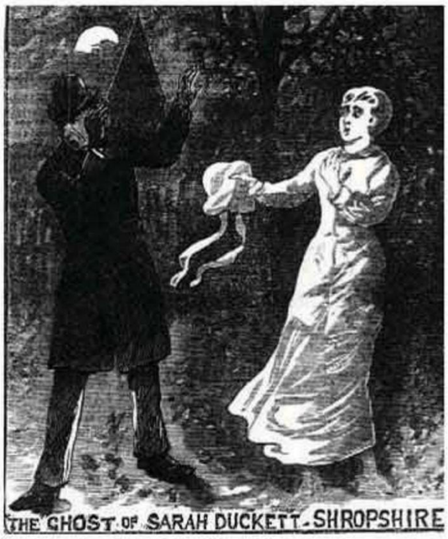
After the ghost hysteria had reigned supreme in Church Stretton for more than a month, another local dignitary wrote to the registrars of Worcestershire, saying that he had spoken to the relatives of Sarah Duckett, who believed that she had died in Worcestershire in 1876. Indeed, it turned out that Sarah Duckett, aged 45, a domestic servant, had expired at the Worcester Infirmary in June 1876. But when Roberts and the other ghost-hunters were told about these matters, they stubbornly shook their heads. Had they not seen the ghost of Sarah Duckett themselves? Surely, there must have been some mysterious conspiracy, with another woman being buried in Worcester to cover up the hideous murder of poor Sarah Duckett, and the theft of her Australian fortune.

Although there were no further sightings of the ghost for many months, Roberts and his friends kept murmuring about Sarah's mysterious fate. In November 1882, a young countryman was drinking at a public house in Church Stretton. When the ghost was mentioned in conversation, he laughed aloud and ridiculed it. But then, walking home, he saw a woman following him. Several times he stopped to let her pass him, but she did not. Finally, he stood still and waited for her to come up to him. When she glided up to him, he could see that she was dressed all in white, and that she was holding her bonnet out to him. It was the ghost!

Nearly delirious with fright, the young man ran home to the farm where he was working. Since then, the *Illustrated Police News* reported, an old man had fainted dead away when accosted by the ghost of Sarah Duckett, a youth on horseback had been severely frightened, and an old lady, seeing the ghost through her parlour window, had received "a serious injury to her nervous system".

Many people around Church Stretton were once more murmuring that Sarah Duckett's ghost was on the prowl. A more likely theory is that some local prankster dressed up as a ghost to have fun frightening some of the gullible locals, and that the same individual had a hand in sending the various anonymous letters.




THE GHOST OF SARAH DUCKETT-SHROPSHIRE

LEFT: The Shropshire Ghost frightens Bill Roberts, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 15 Oct 1881. **BOTTOM:** The ghost of Sarah Duckett appears again, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 25 Nov 1882.

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To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 Apr 2012. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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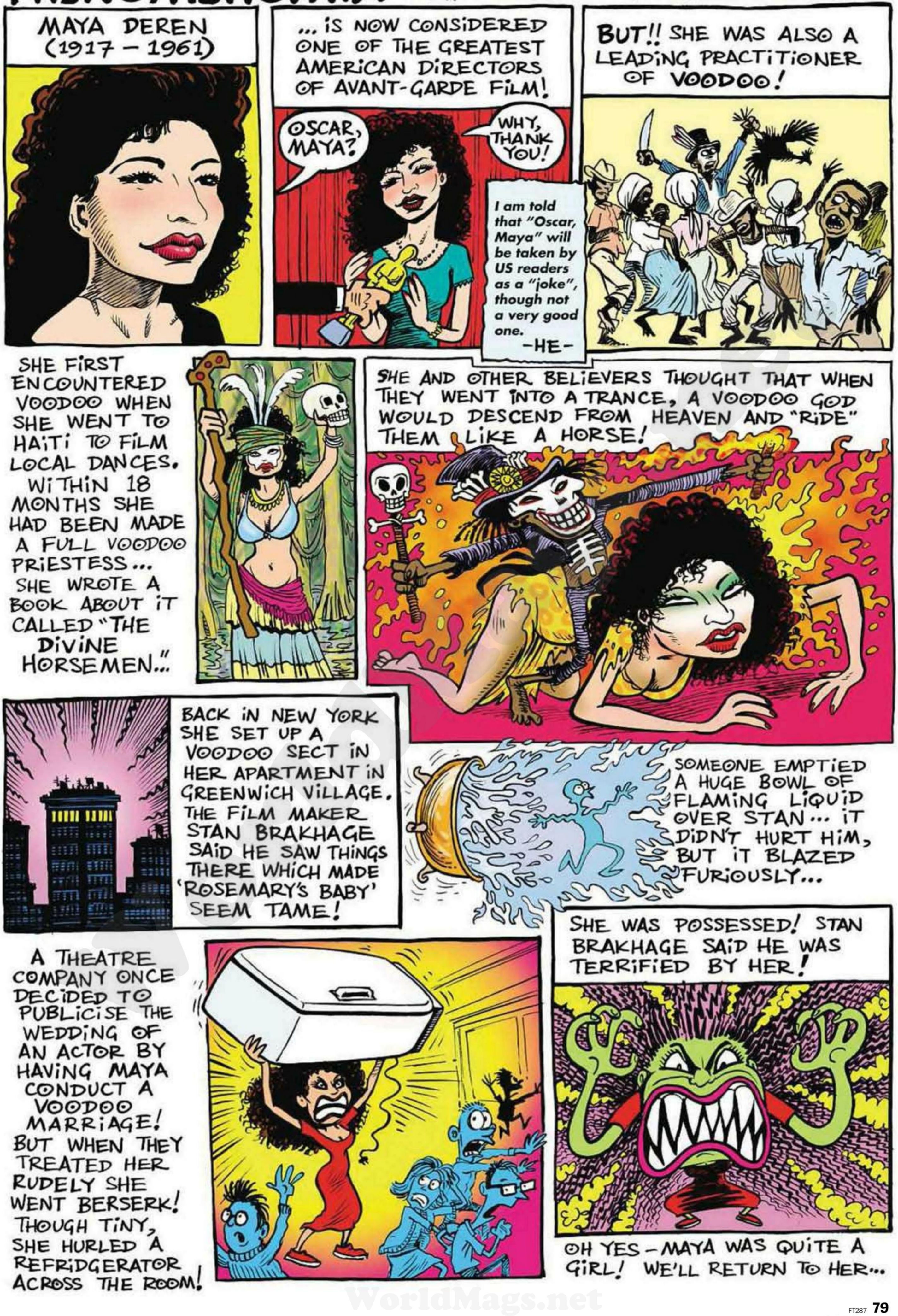
PHENOMENOMIX *MAYA DEREN*

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON


MAYA DEREN (1917 – 1961)
... IS NOW CONSIDERED ONE OF THE GREATEST AMERICAN DIRECTORS OF AVANT-GARDE FILM!
OSCAR, MAYA?
WHY, THANK YOU!
I am told that "Oscar, Maya" will be taken by US readers as a "joke", though not a very good one. -HE-
BUT!! SHE WAS ALSO A LEADING PRACTITIONER OF VOODOO!
SHE FIRST ENCOUNTERED VOODOO WHEN SHE WENT TO HAITI TO FILM LOCAL DANCES. WITHIN 18 MONTHS SHE HAD BEEN MADE A FULL VOODOO PRIESTESS... SHE WROTE A BOOK ABOUT IT CALLED "THE DIVINE HORSEMEN."
SHE AND OTHER BELIEVERS THOUGHT THAT WHEN THEY WENT INTO A TRANCE, A VOODOO GOD WOULD DESCEND FROM HEAVEN AND "RIDE" THEM LIKE A HORSE!
BACK IN NEW YORK SHE SET UP A VOODOO SECT IN HER APARTMENT IN GREENWICH VILLAGE. THE FILM MAKER STAN BRAKHAGE SAID HE SAW THINGS THERE WHICH MADE 'ROSEMARY'S BABY' SEEM TAME!
SOMEONE EMPTIED A HUGE BOWL OF FLAMING LIQUID OVER STAN... IT DIDN'T HURT HIM, BUT IT BLAZED FURIOUSLY...
A THEATRE COMPANY ONCE DECIDED TO PUBLICISE THE WEDDING OF AN ACTOR BY HAVING MAYA CONDUCT A VOODOO MARRIAGE! BUT WHEN THEY TREATED HER RUDELY SHE WENT BERSERK! THOUGH TINY, SHE HURLED A REFRIDGERATOR ACROSS THE ROOM!
SHE WAS POSSESSED! STAN BRAKHAGE SAID HE WAS TERRIFIED BY HER!
OH YES – MAYA WAS QUITE A GIRL! WE'LL RETURN TO HER...

COMING NEXT MONTH

NIGHTWALKER

ON THE TRAIL OF SOUTH AFRICA'S MYSTERIOUS SHAPE-SHIFTER

STAKED OUT

THE CURIOUS HISTORY OF VAMPIRE-KILLING KITS

+

DRACULA TOURISM, MASS HYSTERIA, OCCULTIST RABBIS, AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 288

ON SALE 26 APRIL

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

MAY 1982

Pope John Paul II (JP2) survived two different assassination attempts on 13 May, the anniversary of the first of a series of apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) to three shepherd children at Fátima, Portugal, on 13 May 1917. The first happened in 1981, when JP2 was shot by Turkish hitman Mehmet Ali Agca, as he crossed St Peter's Square in Rome. This month (May 1982), JP2 was at the Fátima shrine to give thanks to the BVM for his recovery from Agca's bullet. As he addressed the crowd at Fátima, an enraged priest wielding a bayonet charged at him. Father Juan Fernandez Krohn was quickly brought down and disarmed while shouting accusations at JP2, accusing him of betraying the Solidarity Union in Poland. Writing about these events in *FT*, Michael Hoffman II noted that Krohn's motive was almost the opposite of Agca's. Agca was "rumoured to be in the employ of the Soviet KGB [who] wanted to stop the Pontiff's encouragement of Solidarity". **FT40:48**

This month, our old pal and contributing wizard, Doc Shiels, was beaten up "by a group of patriotic *Sun* readers" in Falmouth for allegedly saying something seditious about the previous month's British invasion of the Falklands. His fractured skull and bruised ribs required six weeks of treatment, during which Doc was advised to take up accordion-playing instead of golf to rehabilitate his crushed right hand. Contrarian that he is, Doc promptly tried one-handed golf and dislocated the little finger on his left hand. However, he didn't lose his fortean sense of Continuity, writing: "The world's most southerly golf course is at Stanley, in the Falklands... and Stanley is also a Scottish town in the Tayside golfing region... and Falkland is also a Scottish town in the golfing kingdom of Fife, next door to Tayside." **FT39:47**

MAY 1992

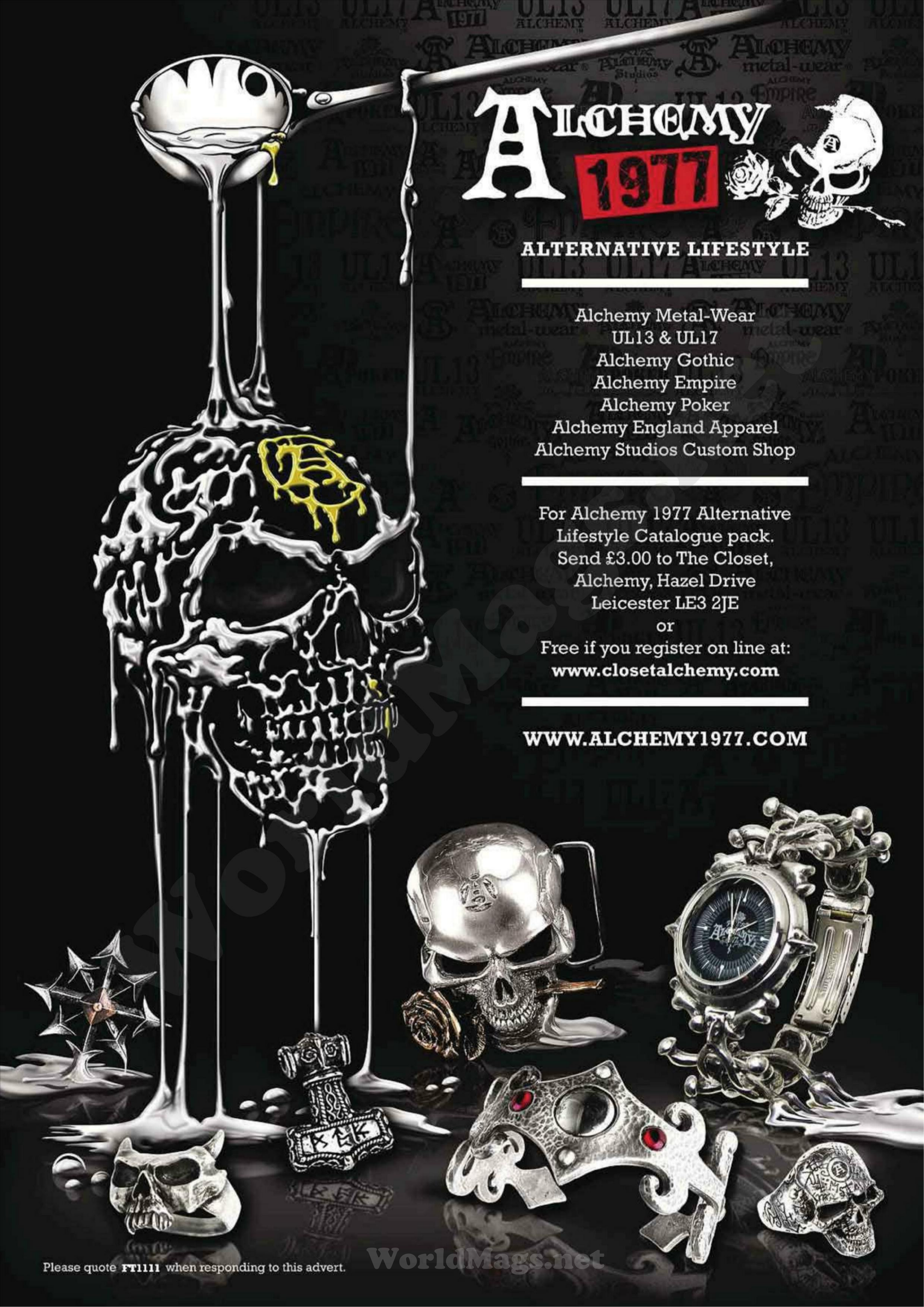
The Philippine presidential elections this month were sidelined when panic swept through the slums of Manila's Tondo district, where residents feared a *manananggal* was on the loose. Local lore describes this as a vampire-like creature of terrifying appearance: the upper half of a harpy-like female that flies at night, dragging its entrails as it searches for unborn babies to devour. People came forward saying they had been attacked, or saw it flying from houses. On the 6th, a live TV crew barged into the home of a "terrified elderly woman" whom local gossip claimed was a *manananggal*. She said she had been attacked by the demon and lost several toes. An "unidentified expert" then accused her of lying, and having transformed (albeit incompletely) back into a woman. To settle the matter, the reporter produced a stingray tail, apparently the Philippine version of garlic to a vampire. The old lady willingly grasped the tail and remained an old lady "to the satisfaction of all concerned". Our live TV events are rarely so dramatic (see below). **FT64:11**

Staying in the Philippines, the world was more interested in Edwin Bayron, 32, a born hermaphrodite who, a local gynæcologist claimed, after surgery to remove his male apparatus and build a vagina, was now pregnant. The Minister of Health felt so proud his country had such a rarity, he offered to pay the medical expenses. When medics, later, found no evidence of pregnancy – on the contrary, he was found to still have his male bits – Bayron and his army lover went on the lam. **FT64:8**

MAY 2002

Luke Helder, 21, an art student at the University of Wisconsin, was arrested for planting 18 pipe bombs in rural mailboxes across five US states. Alongside his homemade bombs he left a rambling letter – headed "Mailboxes are exploding!" – overprinted with his initials and signed "Lucas Helder". Helder, who also headed a band called Apathy, had sent a six-page 'manifesto' to a college newspaper in Wisconsin. His grand plan was to create a pattern of explosions that, when plotted on a map, formed a giant smiley face. At the time of his arrest, the 'smile' was unfinished because his father tipped off the police. In 2004, Helder was declared "incompetent to stand trial" and is detained in a Federal Medical Centre in Minnesota until he is judged to be no risk to the public. **FT161:9**

Topping the list of surreal events for this month was a live TV interview outside Parliament in London. As David Jamieson introduced himself to camera as "the minister for road safety", there was a screeching noise behind him as a pedestrian was knocked down by a bus. The interviewer said later: "The pedestrian left a pool of blood but wandered off clutching his head, telling bystanders he had to catch a train. Nearby, a crow was eating a pigeon." **FT162:12**



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